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EDWARD LEAR AND NONSENSE VERSE

by

© Richard W. O'Brien

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to examine the nonsense verse of Edward Lear in connection with the existing biography on Edward Lear.

Chapter I of this thesis provides a background to the critical study of Lear's nonsense verse by examining the writings of Elizabeth Sewell, Emile Cammaerts, and other writers who assist in defining nonsense. This examination leads to the conclusion that the "field" or definition of nonsense must be broadened to include a consideration of the nonsense author's personality and its influence upon his verse.

Chapter II is devoted to a study of the close relationship of Edward Lear and his nonsense verse. It illustrates a projection of his experiences into the verse which has only been hinted at in previous writing on his nonsense. Chapter III concentrates on the tendency of Lear's verse to alleviate his personal anxieties in the comic images of nonsense. Chapter IV examines the nature of grotesqueries in the nonsense to account for Lear's displacement of his anxieties, and to account for the reader's pleasure in the nonsense. Chapter V discloses the more sublime nature of the songs in contrast to the grotesque nonsense, the limericks particularly.

This thesis maintains that an examination of both Lear's life and writings yields a tribute to a profoundly human being, and also a sense of the power of his nonsense.

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CHAPTER I

THE FIELD OF NONSENSE

Edward Lear is seldom ranked with the great poets of English literature; yet there are few who can claim for their works the familiar spirit of his nonsense verse. There is hardly an English speaking voice that has not sounded the rhymes of "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," or "The Yonghy Bonghy Bo," hardly an ear that has not caught the tightly framed chant of the repetitive Lear limerick, hardly an eye that has not brightened at Mr. Lear's simple but strangely aggressive drawings. Few of Lear's readers, even in his lifetime, associated the nonsense with its author; and yet this is odd, since the course of his life was often as strange and preposterous as his nonsense. His father, Jeremiah Lear, was an aspiring, briefly successful, and subsequently indebted investor. For a man who had hardly the time or the inclination to attend to his children, Jeremiah had an absurdly large family. The last of his and Mrs. Lear's twenty-one children, the plain, myopic, asthmatic, and later epileptic Edward, must have suffered somewhat for lack of parental affection, filial affection in particular (his sister Ann was virtual mother to him for fifty years of his life). It may have been filial neglect, or perhaps his habit of taking a nonsensical view of his life that prompted Edward Lear to invent the story of his Danish-Irish descent and to fabricate the fantastic

tale of his birth into wealth, of his father's irresponsible investment, bankruptcy, and imprisonment, and the subsequent decimation of his family which he attributed to the inattention of a mother who deserted all to serve six-course meals to her incarcerated husband. Edward Lear was in fact born in a rather unfashionable district of London, of parents of English descent. His father was never bankrupt, nor was he imprisoned. His family continued to live at Bowman's Lodge after the debt, at more modest means, and was decimated not so much by the neglect as by slow time and chronic poor health. Though he must have seemed, of all the Lear children, the least equipped to survive, Edward grew into a large-statured old creature who outlived most of his siblings.

Hardly less astounding than the imagined grotesqueries of Edward Lear's unhappy childhood are the real facts of his adult life. He had extensive and abiding friendships with members of the literary and aristocratic nobility of his age. He was an intimate friend of the Tennysons, the favorite author of John Ruskin, drawing master to Queen Victoria, and a welcome guest and visiting court-jester to four generations of Lord Derby's family at Knowsley.[1] He was a prodigious letter writer and during his travels carried with him two large trunks of letters from his friends in England and abroad. He was a perpetual world traveller, who composed sketches and journals in many areas which had never seen an Englishman. He produced enormous quantities of work, often completing in excess of five-hundred drawings in half a year. He was something of a linguist, with his speaking and reading command of six languages.

He was a composer and singer of songs. He has been "collected" on numerous shelves; his limericks have been published countless times in repeated and new editions under diverse titles. His paintings bring a tremendous price on today's markets, and his nonsense is a favorite display of the British Museum. He has been the subject of two biographies, and his verse a subject of two major English works on nonsense. He has not as yet graced the front page of Time magazine, (as have Bach and Marx) but he has had recent and honorable mention in the book reviews section.[2] Considering the recently awakened interest of biographers and psychologists in Lear's life and personality, it is amazing that no major attempt has been made to examine, as one, the nonsense and its author. The biographers of Edward Lear have made but incidental reference to his verse, and the treatises on nonsense have only hinted that there might be a vital and enlightening link between Lear's nonsense verse and his life and character. A review of the major criticism on nonsense will accent the need for the exploration of such a link.

The most outstanding work on the nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll is Elizabeth Sewell's The Field of Nonsense. (1952) Miss Sewell's book is largely an attempt to define nonsense. It is a partial debate in which she has chosen to "throw in ... on the side of Nonsense-as-a-Game rather than on the side of Nonsense-as-a-Dream." She readily admits that her book is an exercise, a game with words in which

> we could follow either of these two threads, the Dream or the Game, through the Alices and Nonsense ... the point to realize is that either would be possible, and in the end they would probably come to the same thing. (Sewell, 41)

Perhaps Miss Sewell would have been more convincing had she played the game fully, debating both sides, dispatching arguments in antithetical directions to approximate some truth. Instead, she extends the argument for "Nonsense-as-a-Game" to its limits. She does not find the truth about nonsense there. When it seems that the arbitrary rules of her reason cannot hold in such rarified atmosphere, she claims that there is no truth to be found about nonsense-as-a-game or as-a-dream.

> Exercises in dialectic, like games, have nothing to do with such a notion as the "truth." We shall not find out the truth about Nonsense, any more than we should if we were to follow the contrary argument, or both at once. Perhaps there is no truth to find out, any more than there would be in a nightmare or a game of chess, the notion being out of place. (Sewell, 41)

Miss Sewell has abandoned dialectic and debated only one side of the question. She has not effectively demonstrated that there is no truth to discover. One cannot object to Miss Sewell's not having found the truth about nonsense. On the other hand, one must object that she has not been true to the nonsense of Edward Lear. In the beginning of her argument she severely limits the field of nonsense to that writing of Lear and Carroll which demonstrates limiting and ordered elements rather than the elements of dream and disorder. Pure nonsense, she argues, must deal with concrete, separable things which are linked only by the most precise relations of number, chronology, and proximity. But having failed or refused to define what nonsense truly is, she cannot rightly distinguish that part of Edward Lear's verse which partakes of "dream and disorder" from that which is "truly nonsense." It is this arbitrary nature of her

dialectic or game which is the essential weakness of her approach to nonsense. I take exception to her argument primarily in her decision to separate dream and game.

> Nonsense may take the form of verse, but we should presumably agree that there is a distinction between this and poetry. This distinction may lie in what one might call the dream element in poetry, its ambiguity, its imagery by which, as in a dream, fusions may take place between images in the mind, its sudden breaks in sequence. Poetry, so Coleridge said, is at its best when only imperfectly understood. There is nothing of this in Nonsense verse. Far from being ambiguous, shifting, and dreamlike, it is concrete, clear, and wholly comprehensible. (Sewell, 23)

Miss Sewell's premise that dream and game are polar opposites becomes particularly troublesome where she describes the relation of dream to dreamer, and play to player.

> I am in a sense playing a game myself in the writing of this, and I cannot play with the notions of memory and reason and so on, since they cannot be split up and controlled .
> . . . . . .
> Dream vision is essentially fluid; nothing is reliable, anything may change into anything else, our comfortable numbered time foreshortens into simultaneity, a thing may be two things, or a person two people, at the same moment. The result is that dreams cannot be controlled and so cannot be played with. From this something rather alarming seems to follow: <u>that dreams play with the dreamer, who is ourself</u>. (Sewell, 36) (underlining mine)

There is a problem here in the terms of reference for the "self" participating in dreams. The statement that the dream plays with the self summons the problem of external and internal forces. The dream cannot play with the dreamer unless there is some outside force, some agent other than self manipulating the dream experience. Miss Sewell makes no mention of an external part of the self as such an agent. She has neglected to establish carefully the <u>agonists</u> in the dream, and the field upon which they contest.

In his study of "The Relation of Wit to Dreams"[3] Sigmund Freud makes observations which define the forces acting in the dream. In his interpretation Dr. Freud notes that there are several forces acting upon, or should we say in, the dreamer: first, the strong need for sleep during the night, secondly, thought impulses continued into sleep from daytime experiences which have been left uncompleted, or unsettled, or suppressed, or which have excited the unconscious. The unconscious is the immediate source of the dream; the other half of self takes into the dream only those conscious parts of experience which have succeeded in arousing a similar and reinforcing unconscious wish. No forces, aside from the obvious ones of somatic origin, are allowed to enter the dream until they are first assimilated into the conscious self and then only those which correspond to the demands of the unconscious self.

Freud's interpretation belies two of Miss Sewell's premises. Firstly, the interpretation demonstrates that it is inaccurate to speak of self in relation to dream except where the dream is an internalized process and when the self is divided into conscious and unconscious functions. The dream is, in fact, very much like a game in which the two parts of the self engage in contest and compromise. Secondly, Freud's interpretation implies that there is a great deal of control in dreams. Miss Sewell has argued that the control essential to the game and to nonsense is impossible in the dream because of the fluidity, ambiguity, and simultaneity of its images. She has excluded from nonsense proper a great many of the songs and some of the verse of Edward Lear on the grounds that they

partake of the dream and therefore disallow the formation of predictable relationships. Freud's remarks on the nature of the self operating in dreams refute Miss Sewell's contention. That in dreams the relations perceived by the conscious self are displaced, there is no doubt. But the unconscious does supply other predictable relations to the new images of the dream. And these dream images are concrete, perhaps more concrete than the ordinary experience of the waking mind, since they are the product of the dream processes, displacement and condensation.

> We know that the dream-material, after being stripped of a great many of its relations, is subjected to compression, while at the same time displacements of the intensity of its elements enforce a psychic transvaluation of this material. The displacements which we have considered were shown to be substitutions of one particular idea for another, in some way related to the original by its associations, and the displacements were made to facilitate the condensation ... So far no mention has been made of any other kind of displacement, but we learn from the analysis that displacement of another kind does occur, and that it manifests itself in an exchange of the verbal expression for the thought in question ... Displacement occurs in such a way that the colorless and abstract expression of the dream-thought is exchanged for one that is pictoral and concrete. The advantage, and along with it the purpose of this substitution is obvious. Whatever is pictoral is capable of representation in dreams and can be fitted into a situation in which abstract expression not unlike that arising if a political leading article had to be rpresented in an illustrated journal. (Freud, 361)

The argument that the dream cannot be controlled because it has no concrete images fades in the light of Freud's analysis of dreams. The images in the dream are refined through condensation and displacement into concrete and pictorial shape. How, then, are they related?

Freud has discovered predictable relationships in dream elements. An examination of Miss Sewell's definition of nonsense in the light of Freud's assertions discloses gaps in her highly

restrictive view of nonsense into which the more dream-like of Edward Lear's verses must be admitted. She has argued that the dream has a random and disjointed quality which is characteristic of neither games nor nonsense. Quite to the contrary, Freud asserted that although the dream displaces the particular forms of logical connections, causal relations, alternatives, antithesis and contextual and temporal representation of waking thoughts, these relations are meticulously replaced by others which, he demonstrates, can be defined in detail and with some reliability. Furthermore, he states that:

> dream-combinations are not made up of arbitrary, completely incongruous elements of the dream-material, but of elements that are pretty intimately related in the dream-thoughts also. (Freud, 363)

The major premise of Miss Sewell's dialectic in The Field of Nonsense, that nonsense is either a dream or a game, is refuted by any consideration of Freudian authority as it demonstrates that dream, game, and consequently, nonsense are similar in respect to concreteness of images, the predictability of relations between images, and the control exercised by the self or parts of the self over each process of dream or game.

Consider, finally, a brief comparison of dreams and games in respect to corresponding elements of contest, process, and time in each. It has been indicated earlier that there is a contest in the dream similar to that in games. Freud establishes that in the dream the unconscious part of self assimilates the materials of the waking world in which "sense" and reason forbid play. The unconscious self indulges in a contest, or game if you will, with the censorial

force of reason in the self. It appears that dream and game are very much alike.

The game is often defined as a process: actions generally confined in time. The conventional relations of images displaced by dream-work are replaced in the dream, according to Freud, largely by relations of process.

> In the first place, the dream renders an account of the connection which is undeniably present between all portions of the dream-thought by rendering them into a unity as a situation or a proceeding. (Freud, 748)

The durations of dreams have, in fact, been found to correspond closely with the time a similar process would take in waking states. (Freud, 467)

The foregoing discussion has touched upon similarities of imagery, relations, control, contest, and process in dreams and in games, none of which were realized in Miss Sewell's argument. Reference to the dream analysis of Freud has not established a full identity between dream and game. There remain, of course, remarkable differences in each. This paper is not concerned with absolving them. The purpose evolving in this discussion is not to debate nonsense as either a dream or a game, but to seek a balanced, or at least a more comprehensive,view, and find out some truth about nonsense.

This discussion of The Field of Nonsense, and games, and dreams in Edward Lear's nonsense verse, with all its emphasis on definition, may seem to be too serious for the topic "nonsense." But Miss Sewell's book must be given serious consideration. Its

original and intriguing ideas constitute a point of departure never entirely to be departed from (this paper is, after all, committed to a middle course). On the other hand, her definition of nonsense so limits the range and exuberance of nonsense that one can be light-hearted only after loosening its bonds. I have argued that the field of nonsense must be enlarged to encompass more of Lear's verse inasmuch as any dream elements there cannot be wholly distinguished from those of the game. Miss Sewell has argued on the basis of Nonsense-as-a-Game that the rules of nonsense are more or less self-generating, that nonsense itself has little to do with its author, and that the more subjective of Lear's verses are not high nonsense. She has also excluded from her definition of nonsense that writing of Lear's which admits the "dangerous and unifying elements of dream and beauty." Perhaps her definition will be less binding if consideration of other authors will broaden the range of nonsense to include more of Lear's superb verses.

Consider how Miss Sewell's findings on game and play are modified by Jean Piaget's analysis of Play Dreams and Imitation in Childhood. Piaget reclassifies games into three types of structures: practice games, symbolic games, and games with rules. Nonsense verses, both Sewell and Piaget would agree, are to be classified as "games with rules." Beyond this there is no harmony since Piaget, to begin with, argues that no rules of games arise spontaneously in an isolated child.[4] His observation that the rules of games are thoroughly rooted in socialization would refute Miss Sewell's contention that nonsense is a game which generates its own rules.

Still more significant to this discussion of the play in nonsense verse is Piaget's definition of play as an interaction of two types of behavior, "assimilation" and "accommodation." Each type of behavior is characterized by its direction. Assimilation is autotelic or inner-directed activity. Accommodation is heterotelic or outer-directed activity.

> In heterotelic activities the direction of the behavior is outwards in so far as there is a subordination of the schemas to reality; whereas in autotelic activites the direction is inwards, insofar as the child, while using the same schemas, enjoys exercising his powers and being aware of himself as the cause of the activity. (Piaget 146)

Using this criteria Piaget is able to subsume earlier, more cumbersome attempts to differentiate play or "ludic activity" from work.

> To sum up, it is clear that all the criteria suggested in order to define play in relationship to non-ludic activity result, not in making a clear distinction between the two, but rather in stressing the fact that the tonality of an activity is ludic in proportion as it has a certain orientation, varying in degree, of the conditions of equilibrium between reality and the ego. We can therefore say if adapted activity and thought constitute an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, play begins as soon as there is predominance of assimilation ... Play is assimilation of reality to the ego, as distinct from "serious thought' in which the assimilating process is in equilibrium with accommodation to other persons and things. (Piaget, 146)

Piaget's concludes that in play, assimilation of reality to the ego predominates accommodation to forces outside the ego. He thereby strengthens the following conclusions and points to these paths to be explored regarding the play in nonsense verse. Firstly, his conclusion reinforces the steps taken in this paper to redefine the forces in control of play: it indicates that, contrary to Miss Sewell's theories, the controlling forces in play are not in the structure of the game itself but in the will, or even deeper perhaps,

in the imagination of the player. This in turn contradicts Miss Sewell's contention that nonsense is impersonal, detached, and self-generating:

> the nonsense universe must be the sum of its parts and nothing more. Parts must be separate and distinct from part, wholes must be analyzable into parts and the total construction must be no more than a detached product of the conscious mind which must never identify itself with the production in any way. (Sewell, 99)

Piaget's conclusions on play would indicate that nonsense is indeed something which should be examined with close and frequent reference to its author in whose imagination it takes its roots.

To examine Emile Cammaerts' The Poetry of Nonsense is to take a step in that direction. Before the step is taken, however, it must be noted that this paper will not give an exhaustive review of Cammaerts' book, any more than it did so of Sewell's. The idea is to review the criticism, cumulatively, and in stages which approximate the views of this paper. Meanwhile the writer will take directions from these writers on nonsense rhymes. These directions, it is hoped, will point to more detailed discussions of Edward Lear to follow.

Hardly any writer on nonsense verse would claim that there are no rules to nonsense. Both Emile Cammaerts and Miss Sewell could agree on that. In nonsense there is a new set of rules replacing or inverting the relations of rational experience. Beyond this point, the views of Cammaerts and Sewell diverge widely. Cammaerts would not agree with Sewell that there is little or none of the personality of Edward Lear in his own nonsense. Cammaerts found in Lear's works a strong characteristic flavour.

> With few exceptions, all Lear's works are steeped in an atmosphere so fanciful and irresponsible, so grotesque and incongruous, that we cannot fail to recognize in them the true characteristics of nonsense. (Cammaerts, 3)

Cammaerts asserts that there are two schools of limerick writers:

> the first, relying entirely for effect on the grotesque picture suggested by the poem and on the incongruous character of its meaning, without attaching undue importance to technical difficulties; the second, staking its all on the witticism disclosed by the last strong line and on the ingenuity of the rhyme. (Cammaerts, 5)

Edward Lear is obviously of the first, the nonsensical school, for the laughter and enjoyment to be had from the nonsensical limerick are not locked in its meticulous conformity to elaborately logical rules, as Sewell would have it - they lie not so much in the technical structure of the limerick itself as in the very act of reading it, or telling it, or composing it. Certainly,

> Lear did not intend to laugh either at his old man on the stile or at his old man in the boat who exclaimed: "I'm afloat!. I'm afloat!" He was far more inclined to laugh at himself for telling such stories, or at his audience for listening to them. We do not admire him for his cleverness; we admire him for his foolishness, for if there is a foolish way of being clever, there is also a clever way of being foolish. (Cammaerts, 9)

Nonsense is a highly social art. Auden, in his introduction to <u>The Oxford Book of Light Verse</u> calls it "<u>vers de société</u>." Cammaerts remarks that most of Nonsense would not have been written were it not for the society and the collaboration of such charmers as the Earl of Derby's grandchildren, Dr. Liddell's daughter, Kipling's "Best Belovedest," and Milne's Christopher Robin.

Cammaerts' observations on the social and personal nature of nonsense strengthen the tendency of this paper to become concerned with Edward Lear as with his poetry, since to read the latter is to come to know and admire the former. Like the anonymous writers

of nursery rhymes Cammaerts so intimately associates with the nonsense poet, Lear could share himself with the child and all who have left in them some remnant of

> the working of the mind of the child, his spontaneous challenge to the dictates of Reason, his hostility to the well-ordered world to which "grown-ups" vainly endeavour to introduce him, his suspicion of human laws and restrictions which tend gradually to transform his "play" into "work." (Cammaerts, 21)

Certainly this talent in Lear was not a matter of deliberate technique, since its very genius is in its "playing" rather than "working" qualities. Perhaps this talent was that of the child in Lear rebelling against his superficially ordered life, against those conventions of his time which demanded he order those things over which he had so little control: his epilepsy, his ugliness, the disproportion of his body, his badly-needed but scarcely satisfying friendships, his chronic lack of funds. Cammaerts' insights into the personal and social nature of nonsense verse indicate to the writer that Lear's personality should not be dissociated from his verse.

The nonsense landscape is now more expansive and yet more personal than it was with Sewell. What other horizons does Cammaerts open for discussion?

In his chapter on "Nonsense and the Child" Cammaerts traces the growth of nonsense as it arises from nursery rhyme, particularly through the animal story, slowly distinguishing itself from nursery rhymes as a whole by its demands on the imagination.

> There is nothing fanciful or nonsensical in going "to market, to market, to buy a plum-cake," to "tumble down hill" like Jack and Jill, to kiss the girls like Georgie Porgie .... All these incidents belong to the child's every-day life and do not require any effort of the imagination. (Cammaerts, 22)

Nonsense, says Cammaerts, distinguishes itself from the fairy tales by its own peculiar "topsy-turvey escape from the house of common-sense."

> For, while the nonsense story deliberately upsets all laws and conventions, the fairy tale merely adds new laws to the old ones. . . . . All poets know that the Fairy-world possess its laws as well as the real world, and that these laws are generally far more sensible and logical. There is no nonsense in Spenser's Fairy Queen... (Cammaerts, 32)

Miss Sewell would agree with Cammaerts that there is no magic in the world of nonsense; but she departs in her theories from what Cammaerts says is the natural propensity of nonsense towards the inversion of dreams.

> The realm of Nonsense is not so much Fairyland as Dreamland, for in Dreamland the two worlds meet, and the memories of the day are twisted into many queer and unexpected shapes by the imaginations of the night. When Alice goes through Wonderland, down the rabbit-hole or through the looking glass, she does not meet Puck, nor even Mother Goose, but the cards and the chess-men with which she has played in her nursery, the beasts she has met in the fields and the heroes and heroines of her nursery rhymes. (Cammaerts, 33)

One can only agree with Cammaerts: after all, Alice must fall asleep to descend to her own dream-like wonderland. She leaves the world of nonsense, dream and madness only when she awakens to logic, reason or sanity. The Looking-Glass-World is also a "let's pretend," playing, assimilating world of dreams where, in pure nonsensical fashion, all order is inverted, where space, time, and value are displaced.

Cammaerts would admit into the nonsense landscape, not only the poet, his feelings and his dreams, but also some elements of beauty, all of which were excluded from its limited and arbitrary confines under Miss Sewell's guardianship. Her argument that beauty is dangerous to nonsense because it "invites the mind of the beholder to some kind of union with the beautiful object," and consequently injects the dream-element into nonsense is not convincing since it has been demonstrated that the dream and the game elements in nonsense are not, in reality, totally exclusive or opposing. And her observation that there is a "general lack of feeling and emotion in nonsense" can be accurate only insofar as she limits that verse of Edward Lear's which she will call nonsense. It is a useful observation, for it accounts, as she states, for the "apparent cruelty in nonsense," and the "magnificent sang froid" with which the victims of the limericks accept their tortuous fate. There seems little reason, however, why it should be such a general requisite to nonsense. There may be places in nonsense where there is a lack of feeling, and places where there is a good deal of feeling. A lack of feeling is more directly related to the humor in nonsense which demands a certain objectivity, a superiority of beholder over the subject of humor, than to any rules of game to be found in nonsense.[5] Certainly humor has proven itself to be a versatile spirit, verging and converging upon love, hate, terror, any number of emotions. Humor could easily abide feeling and personality in nonsense. But one characteristic germinal to humor, its objectivity, Miss Sewell attributes in a priori fashion to what she feels is the absolute

necessity of nonsense to comply with the separateness, the artificiality of a game.

> The absence of relationships... means not merely that each individual is separate... but that the mind of the player is isolated as well, within the framework of the game. This, I believe is the true purpose of the dream which ushers in each of the Alices... It is to isolate the mind completely from all possible contact with real life and real people, with which games have nothing to do. (Sewell, 26)

It is this demand she imposes upon nonsense which makes her react with a strange antipathy to much of Lear's nonsense verse.

> There is a genuine pathos in the "Dong" and the "Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo," even in some odd way in the "Jumblies," and I remember disliking that song when I was a child for that reason, resenting the intrusion into the game of an adult and alien emotion. The limericks are pure nonsense and have nothing of this quality of feeling about them; but in the songs one feels that Lear is, quite literally, not playing the game. (Sewell, 27)

More and more the arbitrary classification of nonsense as a game distinct from dream, emotion, and beauty narrows and constricts Sewell's Field of Nonsense. One cannot help but observe that when she classifies "The Owl and The Pussy-Cat," "The Duck and the Kangaroo," "The Daddy Long-Legs and the Fly," "The Jumblies," "Calico Pie," "The Dong with the Luminous Nose," "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo," "The Pobble who has no Toes," and "The Quangle Wangle's Hat" as "nonsense failures," she speaks of them with mildly perjorative tones of personal displeasure. They fail, she argues, because of their mention of love and other feelings, and because of the presence of the author's personality. But in this she is hardly convincing. She has to admit later that "one agrees to let this personality in the nonsense songs work upon oneself." This she is able to do with Lear's verses, but not with Mr. Dodgson's:

"whereas to Carroll dripping loving verbiage from his pen, we will allow not one square inch of the heart." She accounts for the difference by alluding to the personalities of both authors, which is an unruly thing for her to do since, according to a major premise of her dialectic, nonsense has nothing to do with personality. She allows that Lear was quite sane because of "the union between order and disorder in [his] mind." She maintains that Dodgson, on the other hand, had a defensive, disparate personality. But she does not explain why an author's personality defects should lead one to dislike his poetry. The reader is left only with the original reason: that it does not seem to her to comply with the demands of the game.

Lear's songs have some of the qualities of nonsense about them, she would grant, because they "approach but never quite reach poetry;" but for that matter, neither do the verses of Carroll which she finds so distasteful and remote from nonsense. If the songs themselves are not to be classified as successful nonsense, where, in all of Lear's canon, can "pure nonsense" subsist? Miss Sewell's argument that it is found only in the limericks is weakened by the fact, to be demonstrated later, that they contain as much of the author as the songs. She concedes this in degree when she states:

> In the nonsense proper a sense of physical inadequacy is turned into good account, for distortion and disproportion of bodily features are a good line in the game. (Sewell, 157)

But she does not isolate the kind of personal anxiety stemming from bodily defects from the anxieties which permeate and seem to her to have an adverse effect upon the nonsense of the songs: "the loneliness, the inability to settle in one place, the lack of self-confidence,

the warm-hearted being who never married." (Sewell, 159)

Miss Sewell is forced to explore the personality of Edward Lear to separate her idea of a "pure nonsense game" from songs and "pseudo-poetry." Her failure to effect such a separation is an argument therefore, to extend, in this paper, the proper range of nonsense to verse which may exude emotion, beauty, character, and then to explore all of Lear's nonsense verse for sight of the personal genius which created it.

The direction of such exploration will be, strangely enough, one suggested by Miss Sewell, who, when she argued that Lear could write good nonsense because he was sane, suggested that he exhibited in his letters, the ability to "laugh at himself, his feelings, his art." This obvious but important fact is similar to what Cammaerts stated earlier about Lear's ability to laugh at himself. But Cammaerts suggests that Edward Lear is able to do this in his nonsense as well as his letters. Adding this idea to Miss Sewell's valuable intimation that somehow, in his letters, Lear's anxieties found their way into words, the writer of this paper is prompted to explore how the genius of Lear's verse, which is <u>all</u> superb nonsense, is informed by deeply personal anxieties and feelings which, by clever use of laughter, ridicule and play, he was able to isolate and control therein.

Miss Sewell's restrictions on nonsense have been loosened. Now it seems quite permissible, or even essential to examine nonsense with reference to its author. Perhaps we can approach both Edward

Lear and his nonsense through other writers who have examined him and find thereby "How Pleasant [it is indeed] to Know Mr. Lear."

CHAPTER II

HOW PLEASANT TO KNOW MR. LEAR

Perhaps so little detailed analysis of the nonsense verse of Edward Lear has been accomplished because there is so much of interest to say about the author himself. Those who have written on him have been mainly concerned with his personal anxieties and the colorful, eccentric facts of his life. Little has been done, however, by way of a close reading of his poetry, to establish its connection with the biography.

The earliest and still the most imaginative biography is Angus Davidson's Edward Lear, Landscape Painter and Nonsense Poet. Its apparent authority is evidenced by the fact that for eighteen years after its edition in 1938 little significant research had been added to Davidson's book. In 1964 Mr. Ray Murphy, editor of Edward Lear's Indian Journal cast some doubt upon the melodramatic domestic romance in the Davidson biography. His research into municipal records indicates no sudden drop in the fortunes of Edward Lear's father like that from opulence to poverty described by Lear himself. No record was found that the elder Lear was ever confined to King's Bench prison. Edward Lear was not born as he claimed to be, at the magnificent Bowman's Lodge, but in the nearby and then unfashionable Holloway district.

In a recent paper "The Nonsense of Edward Lear," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, Warren J. Baker attributed Lear's successful

long enough to give a thorough exegesis of his nonsense, but no less charming for that matter, are those brief sketches of Lear by Honor Tracey and Alison White. In her debate with an imaginative "Doktor Horstdraut Schwamm" Miss Tracey defends the idea that Edward Lear was not "always entirely practical" and that when Mr. Lear chose to remain a bachelor a wonderfully "runcible" husband was lost to the world. In a convincing argument for imitative style, Miss Tracey has reviewed nonsense in nonsense fashion.[2]

Alison White's "With Birds in His Beard" which fills only two pages of Saturday Review, Jan. 15, 1966, is written in a rhythm as rapid and full of happenings as a Lear Limerick. In a short space it discusses a remarkable number of things: Lear's biography; the very important fact that "in his limericks the grotesque, ailing, exiled, lonely poet and painter took note of his deprivations;" the "sensitive, elegaic tone" of the nonsense songs; the violence and its compensations in the limericks; and Darwinism, and death. Miss White's most interesting observation is her attribution of the genius of Lear's nonsense verse to the poet's sublimation.

> It is perhaps only by the -- for us -- fortunate circumstance of the poet's despair and self-deprecation that his intense poetic phantasms should have emerged humbly as owls and pussy-cats, ducks and kangaroos. (White, 26)

Alison White's article seems unfortunately brief, but its concentration on the text of Lear's nonsense verse and its observations on the source and nature of the genius of such verse are certainly encouraging to this paper.

In the introductory pages of his collection: The Complete

Nonsense of Edward Lear. New York, 1951, Mr Holbrook Jackson exhibits a "Self-Portrait of the Laureate of Nonsense." Since Mr. Holbrook, hardly a critic has begun a discussion of Lear without reference to one or both of the drawn and written portraits. Though they were not originally intended as matching self-portraits, they juxtapose to form a useful beginning for my discussion of Edward Lear and nonsense verse.[3]

There are two major figures in the drawing. One is an unmistakable pen-portrait of Edward Lear; he presents his hat, his card and handkerchief that he might identify himself to the character in the foreground who is just as unmistakably Lear's nonsense counterpart. The two figures of the drawing are so contrasted as to represent two worlds: the rational, everyday world in the almost photographic likeness of Lear, (an accomplishment in figure drawing he seldom attempted or achieved) and the nonsense picture of the world in the economic, caricaturic lines of the surprised, balding, and spherical old fellow opposite. Behind the glasses and beard the almost inscrutable face of Lear seems to hint his awareness of the confrontation in this picture of the real-life Edward Lear and that projection of himself which he laughed at in his nonsense. It seems a deliberate step taken by the author to establish the close alliance, the essential inseparability of the supposedly distinct realities of nonsense and life. Turn the glance of the spectacled Lear a trifle outwards and it is as if he were saying, "Here are two worlds; here are two Edwards, and I dare to confess them both as myself." There could no longer be any doubt in the minds of the readers of The Book of

Nonsense that its author, "Mr. Lear," represented a real "eggzisten" Edward Lear and not a cleverly anagrammed "Earl" of Derby.[4] Nor can modern readers fail to recognize in the balding, surprised, spherical "fellow traveller in the world of nonsense" a great deal of Edward Lear himself.

The more realistic and therefore more composed Lear of the drawing seems wholly aware of such tacit confession. Surprisingly enough, it is the nonsense figure who is most shocked by the confrontation. His face, especially his eye, displays the admixture of shock and naive horror typical of the other figures illustrating Lear's nonsense, the limericks particularly. His hands and arms rise above the sloping, spherical body in a gesture signifying the typical disorientation of the limerick subjects.

It follows therefore, that this nonsense projection of Lear resembles in many ways the "epistolary caricatures" Lear was wont to make of himself. He bears the bulbous body, stick legs, arms and limbs all akimbo in that perfect, dancing imbalance of the self-caricatures which were seal and signature to so many Lear letters.[5] Lear was aware that both the figures of his self-portrait were genuine, the nonsense figure being no more a forgery than the other, neither figure completely representative without the other.

Lear's portrait in poem goes admirably well with that in pen to disclose how thoroughly Lear is implanted in his nonsense.

How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!
    Who has written such volumes of stuff!
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
    But a few think him pleasant enough.

His mind is concrete and fastidious,
    His nose is remarkably big;
His visage is more or less hideous,
    His beard it resembles a wig.

He has ears, and two eyes, and ten fingers,
    Leastways if you reckon two thumbs;
Long ago he was one of the singers,
    But now he is one of the dumbs.

He sits in a beatiful parlour,
    With hundreds of books on the wall;
He drinks a great deal of Marsala,
    But never gets tipsy at all.

He has many friends, laymen and clerical;
    Old Foss is the name of his cat;
His body is perfectly spherical,
    He weareth a runcible hat.

When he walks in a waterproof white,
    The children run after him so!
Calling out, 'He's come out in his night-
    Gown, that crazy old Englishman, oh!'

He weeps by the side of the ocean,
    He weeps on the top of the hill;
He purchases pancakes and lotion,
    And chocolate shrimps from the mill.

He reads but he cannot speak Spanish,
    He cannot abide ginger-beer:
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
    How pleasant to know Mr. Lear! (Nonsense, vii)

This odd old man is closely related to the old persons of the limericks. There are one hundred and fifty-four old men in the limericks alone, seventy-seven in each of the first two books of nonsense: The Book of Nonsense (1846), Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets (1871). Nearly half of them have the Lear-like "spherical body."

Fourteen old men are bearded; three have wigs which resemble beards, and which are serviceable for warmth, disguise, and use as bird-nests. Nearly all limerick figures have "remarkably big" noses. Eight are "hideously" large; but they make wonderful lantern carriers, horns, bird branches and, generally, objects of amusement. One nose ends in tassels; some noses are carried; one is bade sad farewell as it grows out of sight.[6]

Not unlike the Mr. Lear who consumes with impunity "a great deal of Marsala," the Limerick characters are preoccupied with food -- no less than sixty-one of them. Nineteen kindly minister food to fishes and animals. Thirty-six eat strange quantities of eccentric foods primarily for comfort, though often out of compulsion. Six, in turn, are being eaten. Edward Lear's strange but colorful interest in food finds its way into the nonsense recipes for "amblongus pies, crumboblious cutlets, and gosky patties." The same Lear who pictures himself purchasing "pancakes and lotion and chocolate shrimps" revels in his nonsense songs in diets of "lavender water tinged with pink, eggs and buttercups fried with fish, silvery bees and stilton cheese." It has to be more than coincidence that Lear's most lyrical poem is entitled "Calico Pie." The concern for food in the nonsense not only establishes the projection by Lear of his habits into his writing: it alludes to its source in some deeply patterned anxiety in Lear. The discussion of this anxiety must follow further proof of Lears self projection in his nonsense, in the songs particularly.

"Long ago he was one of the singers/ But now he is one of the dumbs." It seems incongruous that such an unfortunate old man

as Lear describes himself could ever be "one of the singers." But sing he does in the nonsense songs. And hardly a song lacks the sense of some indescribable loss which leads inevitably to the most painful loss of all, of the ability to sing. To many the most exciting and enchanting of all Lear's verse, the songs are too few and too soon ended. The images of their various singers coalesce easily into a Lear, once singer, now struck dumb with amazement, or grief, or knowledge too absolute, he having sung it all.

When he can no longer sing, "He weeps by the side of the ocean." With Lady Jingly Jones on the heaped stones of Coromandel Coast he weeps, and with the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo on the slippery Myrtle Slopes. Lear "weeps on the top of the hill." There, on the Chankly Bore he weeps with the Dong, then slowly strays with him into wandering pilgrimage. When his own restless wanderings were restricted or unsatisfying, Lear would take his thoughts and words on a fantastic "jumblied" voyage into the "torrible zone." Only there, in the nonsense landscape of moonlight and brown, shaded mountains could he find relief. When he returned, he did so like the Jumblies, mysteriously, amazingly, and to great joy.

Proof of the articulation of Lear's personality in verse inevitably leads to the question of signification and motive. Nonsense does not arise in a vacuum, nor has it generating powers of its own so that it may possess the person who is to write it. The source of Edward Lear's nonsense is a tendency in its author. To define "tendency" and its operation in nonsense it is necessary to refer to Freud's work on "Wit and its Relation to The Unconscious."[7]

Freud classifies wit most generally as "harmless wit" and "tendentious wit." He differentiates the two initially by stating that harmless wit is usually accompanied by moderate laughter which can be traced in effect to the technique of play with words. Tendentious wit, though it taps laughter by similar skills in technique, is characterized by a greater quantity of laughter insofar as it has served to release psychic energies formerly employed to inhibit aggression or exhibitionism.

It should be noted here that laughter in wit, as Freud defines it, is a property exclusive to the audience. The author of wit seldom experiences laughter. Nevertheless, he does experience the pleasure of the release of psychic energy formerly employed in damming aggression or exhibition. (Freud, 696) Having established some connection between the production of pleasure in wit by the tendency to economize in psychic expenditure, Freud surveys wit-tendencies thus:

> Wherever wit is not a means to its end, i.e., harmless, it puts itself in the service of but two tendencies which may themselves be united under one viewpoint; it is either hostile wit serving as an aggression, satire or defense, or it is obscene wit serving as sexual exhibition. (Freud, 693)

A great deal of Lear's nonsense is tendentious, serving as an aggression, or, more particularly, as a defense. How this can be so might more easily be demonstrated after examining what Freud says about the "invective" quality of aggressive wit. He explains that violent hostility, being inhibited by law, and the understanding of the "concatenation" of the human emotions having robbed us of the capacity to become angry at our enemies, we have learned to express our emotions verbally rather than directly. This more acceptable aggression affords pleasure or relief with the accompaniment of

surplus psychic energy.

> There had developed a new technique of invectives, the aim of which is to enlist the third person [or society] against our enemy by scorning and ridiculing him. We directly obtain the pleasure of his defeat by the laughter of the third person, the inactive spectator.
>
> We are now prepared for the role that wit plays in hostile aggression. Wit permits us to make our enemy ridiculous through that which we could not utter loudly or consciously on account of existing hindrances; in other words, wit affords us the means of surmounting restrictions and of opening up otherwise inaccessible pleasure sources. (Freud, 698)

The whole of this quotation does not apply directly to Lear any more than the word "wit," as Freud used it, applies specifically to nonsense.[8] However, two valuable definitions can be taken from Freud's discussion and applied directly to Lear's nonsense: that of "tendency" and that of "invective" and its power. While in the above quotation Freud discusses the power of invective over some enemy external to the initiator of wit, he remarks later in his work that tendency wit serves to isolate and ridicule an internal enemy: "a particularly favorable case for tendency-wit results if the intended criticism of the inner resistance is directed against one's own person." The vast amount of self-deprecation in Lear's nonsense can, in this light, be accredited to his tendency to turn invective against his own keenly-felt inferiorities. By projecting his own comic or absurd image into his nonsense he could objectify and diminish something about his person which he might regard as an "enemy." This is especially true of congenital and involuntary characteristics which society would interpret as failings. While his bodily ugliness, his nervous defects, asthma, and epilepsy, his inability to maintain meaningful and lasting companionships, his

failure to succeed at his chosen vocation, landscape painting, and the consequential chronic lack of funds were all beyond his practical control; as features of his nonsense drawings and verse they could be named and controlled.

Freud recognized the value of language in controlling experience, and many since him have expanded on this function of language.[9] The naming function of language serves to bring processes into control where there can be shaken from them those ominous qualities of ambiguity which, because of their surprise value, are capable of stimulating guilt, fear, and resentment.[10] The rewards or satisfactions of the naming process need not always be expressed in laughter, nor are they restricted to the audience of the comic or art. Whether the tension-inducing object or process is deprived of its surprise value vicariously or by some creative, personal act, the naming affords a degree of the same pleasurable economy of energy. Whether the energy is dressed in Freudian terms as a saving in intellectual, inhibitory or emotional energy, or in the terms of the behaviorist psychologist as a more or less sudden reduction in tension from a high level of anxiety is finally of little consequence to this paper. The point is, such a reaction is at least temporarily satisfying, and can be looked to as a justification for tendency and invective or "naming" in nonsense verse.

CHAPTER III

TENDENCY IN EDWARD LEAR'S NONSENSE VERSE

The tendency of Lear's nonsense to control and diminish anxieties seems to focus most sharply on his congenital failings. In a letter to Chichester Fortesque, in 1882, Lear himself concluded that his most acute anxieties arose from failings and misgivings beyond his voluntary control.

> I have lived to ascertain positively that much of the evil of my life has arisen from congenital circumstances over which I -- a child -- could have had no control; a good deal too has been the result of various ins and outs of life's vagaries.

Among those familiar with Lear's nonsense and letters there is little disagreement that the congenital and other circumstances which caused him most painful concern were his ugliness, epilepsy, loneliness, poverty, and his misgivings about the nature and solidity of reality.[1]

We have seen his preoccupation with ugliness and what he must have felt to be the grotesque distortion of his features and body confided in "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear." There, and in his nonsense generally, he re-embodied the features of his own ugliness in bulbous bellies, distorted features, and disproportionate limbs. However much his ugliness must have bothered him, Lear could talk freely and openly about it. His nervous disorders on the other hand, and his epilepsy in particular, he could never confront openly, and never humorously, except as he did so, indirectly, in nonsense

verse and drawings.

To see signs of the epilepsy in the nonsense one need look no further than the self portrait previously examined. It is interesting to note in the self-portrait of Lear that the visage of the Laureate Lear is quite inscrutable, while on the face of the nonsense counterpart is an expression of shock or surprise. The shock, the involuntary gestures of the arms, and the backward posture of the body could stand as clues to the epilepsy which, nearly every day since Lear's seventh year of life, had crept upon him and possessed him unawares.[2]

There is hardly a nonsense drawing which does not feature one or several creatures seized by a similar fit. Their expressions of surprise and horror, the strange and "more or less hideous" grimaces and the corresponding convulsive twisting and flinging of limbs merge into the more general pattern of an involuntary dance into which so many subjects of the nonsense drawings are caught.

They dance with ducklings, ravens, fishes, cats. They defy all laws of gravity and propriety by jumping incredibly high, swinging on trees, balancing on wheels, on their heads, and on enormous insects. Still, few break these laws with impunity. They are subject to scornful laughter and outraged indignation. Nearly every figure, since most are in motion of some sort, seems caught in a moment of imbalance. Supported precariously on their toes, heels, or one leg or arm, they seem about to fall backwards or slide forward, even those sitting. It takes very little imagination to

remove the props which hold them momentarily static in the nonsense drawings, for the clues are there which would suddenly have them falling, or rushing, or flying to some jarring and deserved fate. Nearly all the figures who do not engage in the dance must be restrained physically, or with strange quantities of eccentric foods, with blows, or beer, or with buckets and sacks over their heads. Both this sense of restraint and that of sudden, mindless motion in Lear's crazed dancers suggests very strongly his own frenzied experiences with epilepsy.

And his anxiety over his nervous defects suggested by the dancing figures of his nonsense seems to direct itself into the other forms of their motion. Many limerick personages more self-directed in their movement than the dancers seem nevertheless to be engaged in a frantic if determined flight, seeking some unknown destination or fleeing some monstrous fate. This movement, like the dance, brings to mind Lear's nervous defects, his asthma in particular. He often sought relief from it in travel to dryer climes; more often it appears that he sought the anonymity of exotic places to escape the embarrassment he felt in the company of his countrymen. In his collection: The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear Holbrook Jackson notes this of Lear's perpetual travel.

> His craving for movement is like a chronic desire to run away from himself. As he grew older he believed that a sedentary life, after moving about as he had done for over half a century, would "infallibly finish him off suddenly." This restlessness was no doubt due to a nervous defect... There was a reason for his fears, whimsically as he often stated them, for he was an epileptic and suffered also from chronic asthma and bronchitis, from which he ultimately died. (Nonsense, ix)

While Mr. Jackson takes only brief notice of Lear's anxieties over ugliness and epilepsy, he does take stock of Mr. Lear's pecuniary anxieties. This is understandable since the grumbling old nonsense poet made the short supply of money "a stock subject of his letters." Mr. Jackson also notes that Lear did "not succeed in saving more than three hundred pounds until he was past fifty." Lear's most ambitious artistic endeavors, like that of painting illustrations for a book of Tennyson's poems, generally failed. He was totally dependent upon the vagaries of public taste and upon generosity for the sale of his landscape paintings and sketches. He was seldom assured of financial success or even security. This fact constantly preyed upon him; consequently, he was never assured in his desperate struggle for success as a landscape painter. These pecuniary troubles, with which Lear was so constantly preoccupied in his conversations, and letters, and work, would likely be insinuated into the nonsense. It is not difficult to imagine their manifestation there in terms of food-goods and their consumption. Had the poet Lear not made such an association in the fantastic, almost nonsensical story of the elder Lear, imprisoned and disgraced by financial losses, able to take consolation in only the six course meals served him in his cell by his wife? Edward must have had an impressive sense of the absurd consequences of "food as consolation," for the rest of his fictional but very romantic story implies that the expense at which his mother maintained her husband's prison diet was responsible for the break-up of the family and the subsequent death of four sisters in as many months. In Lear's limericks

alone there are thirty-six characters whose eating habits are not unlike those of the compulsive old Lear of the story. The strong feelings of filial desertion and deprivation which must have incited Edward to portray his father as such a compulsive and selfish, almost cannibalistic, figure, are mollified in the eating figures of the limericks. Still, there is good reason to believe there may be dark feelings transferred into the delightsome nonsense recipes, into the remarkable and deliciously detailed sustenance of the Pobble, the Jumblies, the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, and other characters in the nonsense songs.

The sense of desertion or loneliness is perhaps the most pervading impression in all of Lear's nonsense and writing. This is in some ways remarkable, for Lear kept an active correspondence with hundreds of people, often marvelling how he could have "so many certainly real friends." Still, he could not be everything to his friends, nor they to him. Often he remarked on his loneliness, as when at the marriage of Chichester Fortesque to Lady Waldegrave he noted, "each marriage of friends rather seems to leave one on the bleak shore alone." And it must be remembered that his incongruous appearance and his epilepsy filled him with a frightful self-consciousness. This and his dislike for thoughtless crowds of people struck into his life an ambivalence which had him wandering for the most part of his life far from England and his closest friends He often yearned for them strongly. Once, in response to the unfeeling attitudes of Franklin Lushington, to whom Lear was greatly attracted, he wrote to Fortesque in England:

I am coming to England as fast as I can. Why are you coming say you? because I can't stay here any longer -- without seeing friends & having some communion of heart & spirit with one who should have been this to me, I have none... And I can't bear it. And I want to see my sister... And You. And my dear Daddy Holman Hunt, & other people. So I'm off.[3]

As he grew older, he observed his friends building families and lives of their own. His own family disintegrated with the death of his older sister, Emily, and he felt more and more an observer on the fringes of life. Often he assumed a tone of indifference:

By degrees one is coming to look on the whole of life as a dream, and one of no very great importance either if one is not in a position to affect the lives of others particularly.[4]

Such attempts were brave but futile. Lear was, above all, and, for all his endearing qualities, a very lonely man, doomed to self-exile.

His sense of loneliness deeply informed his nonsense verse. The figures there are almost invariably isolated. Some of them strike up friendships, or at least show concerned service for birds and beasts; but just as many find their companions a nuisance or menace. The Young Lady in White is horribly oppressed by birds of the air. The Old Man in the Tree and the Old Person of Dover are respectively bored and stung by bees. Limerick characters are eaten by calves and by bears, snapped up by puppies, threatened by "horrible cows and virulent bulls." There is even less peaceful coexistence between man and man in the nonsense. The protagonist of each limerick is almost invariably alone and in conflict with his environment. He is characterized by alien and eccentric behavior. In each case, the society in the verses, most often an

impersonal "they" or "the people," reacts towards the non-conformist protagonist with characteristic aggression or indifference. They smash the Old Person with the Gong and the Old Person of Buda. The obnoxious Old Person of Snark is beaten, the Old Person of Chester stoned, the Old Man of Ibreen thumped, and the Old Man who screamed out is knocked about for his efforts. The Old Men of Wrekin, Slough, Brill, the Dee, Cassell, Melrose, the Old Man of the West, the Old Man in the boat, and the Old Man with the beard are all cajoled by unsympathetic publics. The Young Person of Smyrna is threatened with burning, the Old Man of Columbia disgusted with hot beer, the Old Man at a station silenced with snuff and the Old Man of Cheadle put in stocks. Several persons are encouraged to travel: The Old Man of Dumblane because of his long legs, the Old Man of Thermopylae for boiling eggs in his shoes. The Old Person of Loo chooses to "continue to stay" while the Old Person of Basing has the presence of mind to escape on a steed. The Old Person of Bow is given some soap and coldly sent packing. It is remarkable that the reader is seldom induced to feel pity for such creatures. It is much easier to laugh when the outraged "people" inflict punishment upon the limerick "persons," or to experience a delicious indifference when unfortunate old men like those of Peru and Erlin are baked in ovens and cakes respectively by the blind, unfeeling public.

Some of the nonsense <u>personae</u> are as inclined as was Lear to strike back at the incredulity, stupidity, and insensitivity of the anonymous public. Some resort to open aggression, throwing apples

and pears, laying about with pokers, kicks, and sticks. The Old Person of Stroud finds herself "horribly jammed" in a crowd (which must have resembled the curious non-buyers who frequented Lear's studios and the mindless, superstitious crowds who interrupted his paintings abroad).[5] She impulsively slays some with a kick; some she "scrunched with a stick." Some nonsense figures, quite unlike their author, have the audacity to flaunt their eccentricities. They dazzle and astonish, alarm and embarrass, confuse and depress those who are not inclined to sympathize with their appearance and behavior. They successfully turn the frightening edge of the grotesque to a public which has punished by laughter and derision. They employ their perversity to advantage. By the astonishing power which confessed eccentrics have over the normal and curious, the Old Man in a garden befuddles and dismisses all intruders.

> There was an Old Man in a garden
> Who always begged every-one's pardon;
> When they asked him, "What for?"- he replied, "You're a bore!
> And I trust you'll go out of my garden." (205)

Some limerick characters assume a bland indifference to their eccentricities and their public consequences. When confronted with their pain and embarrassment the Old Persons of Hurst, Parma, Sestri, Wick, Junction, and others make assorted stoic reply: "what matter", "hum", "how forlorn", merely "Bong", "whizz", "Tick-a-Tick-Tick-a-Tack", ungraciously turning tormentors aside with questions: "is it so?", "who are you?".

Their isolation from others broadens to an isolation from life itself. They accept the cruelty and absurdity of their fate with magnificent existential <u>sang-froid</u>. They fall quite casually

into broths, remark calmly on severed thumbs and arteries. Their attitudes are both casual and courageous.

> There was a Young Lady of Norway,
> Who casually sat in a doorway;
> When the door squeezed her flat, she exclaimed "What of that?"
> This courageous Young Lady of Norway.

Not to be outdone by her in this contest against absurdity of character and fate is the

> Old Person of Gretna,
> Who rushed down the crater of Etna;
> When they said, "Is it hot?" He replied, "No, it's not!"
> That mendacious Old Person of Gretna.

But the nonpareil of magnanimity is of course

> ... a Young Person of Jania
> Whose uncle was always a fanning her;
> When he fanned off her head, she smiled sweetly, and said,
> "You propitious old person of Jania ". (186)

Edward Lear was, for the most part, unable to accept his hardships and loneliness with such serenity . It was his experience, in real life as in nonsense, that his self-imposed exile from loved ones became an inevitably expanding isolation from life itself. Not being able to "affect the lives of others particularly" Lear was cast further onto the far shores of life from which all life appeared to be a dream only. As ever, beneath the bright, aggressively humorous facade of the limericks is the chthonic statement. This one, the solipsist's view of the world, was occasioned by Lear's isolation and loneliness.

The nonsense songs as well as the limericks are full of allusions to loneliness. It is true that a few figures in them are able to achieve unions of some kind. But they make the strangest couples: owls and pussy-cats, ducks and kangeroos,

nutcrackers and sugar-tongs, spiders and flies. And then, they are able to preserve their companionships only by escaping to distant, exotic places, inaccessible to more human-like beings. Such beings as the Dong, the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, even the two Old Gentlemen and the Sage all bear in some eccentricity of body or visage an unmistakable resemblance to their author, and all are doomed to be failures, outcasts, alone.

In her short sketch of Lear in the "Writers and Their Work" series[6] Joanna Richardson demonstrates an admirable sensitivity to the poetic and nonsense value of the songs while documenting therein Lear's expression of his loneliness. She casts light on the unmistakable correspondence of the song "The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo" and Edward Lear's hopeless courtship with Augusta Bethell. In this, as in most of Lear's friendships, there was nothing lacking in affection of either party for the other. There is no doubt that, had he proposed to her (and he very nearly did) she would "almost certainly have accepted him." As ever, it was Lear's awareness of his own infirmities which signified for the two "the death of all hope."

Something in the name of the "Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo" indicates the strangely low and sacrificial regard of self which served so effectually to isolate Lear from others. Miss Richardson notes that Lear and a young American friend, Margaret Terry, first used the name "yonghy-bonghy bo's" to describe the chestnut burrs they kicked before them in their forest walks. In this, what he said to Lord Carlingford (Dec. 25, 1871) was his "most significant poem

ever," Lear must have seen both himself and his nonsense counterpart, the unsuccessful, much lamented paramour of Lady Jingly Jones, as such burrs, kicked carelessly about by the indifferent giants, fate and coincidence.

While the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo like the Dong and the Pobble is actively amusing, he is quiescently pathetic. Lear fashioned his creatures in grotesque forms strange and inhuman enough not to be pitied too much. They are not maudlin or sentimental. He must have sensed that these creations, projections of himself, were in danger of becoming bathetic. Perhaps he was aware of the volatility of a mixture of laughter and pity and was willing to accept the compromise of an anticlimactic comic effect somewhere short of pathos and somewhat more deliberate than bathos. So that, while Lear infused himself into his nonsense creatures, he consistently regarded himself there in a carefully guarded fashion. However pitiable he may have been in fact, he never once regarded himself in his nonsense as anything more than a clown, evoking a mixture of pity and amusement calculated, however, to yield more amusement than pity.

In his clownish nonsense personalities he furnished friends and children with a laughter brewed out of his own painful fears and inadequacies. Those features of the nonsense figures which make them most absurd, their ugliness, eccentricities, compulsions, and mishaps are distanced and comic reflections of the same features in his own life and personality. While Lear united others in laughter by his self-deprecation, he remained essentially isolated and lonely. To evoke pity rather than laughter he would have to make a direct confession of his weaknesses. He could not bear the

embarrassing exposure which would result from his bringing his audience from amused regard to sympathy. He was assured that no one outside his family knew of his epilepsy. How could he openly confess his highly suppressed but undeniable homosexual yearnings? His friends were of England's artistic and landed aristocracy, and how could a "damned dirty landscape painter" feel at ease for long in their presence? Though a loving and highly social creature, Edward Lear was so embarrassed by his shortcomings that he could not bear the shame and vulnerability that invariably accompany even the most affectionate pity or patronage.

But while each personal confrontation of his ugliness, epilepsy, failures, poverty, and his loneliness seems to have been painful to him, when he projected these anxieties into nonsense, he could control them, name, and diminish them in laughter. How his nonsense transforms such frightening and personal anxieties into harmless, unsympathetic, and therefore comic images is the next concern of this chapter.

That the comic in nonsense is the consequence of a transformation or diminishing of the surprise value of the comic subject is agreed upon by the proponents of many theories of the comic. The idea of a diminishing incongruity can be related to those theories of comedy which find the roots of the comic in tension reduction, in superiority, in aggression or incongruity. I do not intend to choose one theory since none is wholly exclusive of another or adequate in itself. And since my task is to demonstrate the naming and controlling power of Learian nonsense, not to validate any one theory of the comic,

the theories are sustained by their own authority. As such they will be held as mirrors to reflect upon Lear's nonsense landscape, disclosing there hitherto unnoticed features. My argument about the effect of nonsense verse upon its author and audience seems to align best with the superiority theory of the comic, that initiated by Hobbes and modified by Bain, Ludovici, and Henri Bergson.[7] In the light of this theory nonsense can be seen to afford to its author and audience the exhilarating experience of rising above the nonsense subject. It would seem to have been especially exhilarating to Lear since his nonsense is saturated with projections of personal failings he could not otherwise objectify and control.

Henri Bergson's theory of the comic best demonstrates the potential of Lear's nonsense to grant superiority and control. Bergson's phrasing, his constant reference to the work of poets and playwrights make his argument centrally literary. For my purposes, it seems the outstanding virtue of Bergson's prose is the abundance of its images. His perception of the comic is so vividly graphic that it can be employed to penetrate through the nonsense drawings of Lear to the very heart of his nonsense verse. What better way is there to evince the comic value of Lear's nonsense than to examine the limerick drawings in the light of Henri Bergson's Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic? As a preliminary I shall outline Bergson's definition of the comic and add to it some views of the comic which will better equip it to accent the comic highlights in the nonsense of Edward Lear.

After observing the strictly human range of the comic, its

"momentary anaesthesia of the heart," its social and environmental function, Bergson arrives at what he calls "a central image" of the comic: "something mechanical encrusted upon the living."[8] From this "mental crossway," Bergson notes, "the imagination branches off in three directions." As it stretches to each pole, Bergson's imagination envisions manifold examples of the comic which converge into general categories of images bearing these three properties: first, "some rigidity or other;" secondly, the property of an incident which "calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned;" and finally, that property of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing or, "the impression of . . . automatism, of movement without life." All three aspects "express an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective." This corrective, Bergson notes, "is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and events . . . an unavowed intention to humiliate and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed."

Though Henri Bergson indicates the human traits which induce laughter, he makes no attempt to explain how the comic can be employed (as I argue it must be by Edward Lear) to objectify and diminish personal fears by exposing them. To explain how Lear employed nonsense to control or objectify his anxieties I will subsume Bergson's comic theory into that of D.H. Berlyne.[9] A construct of the two theories would retain Bergson's view of how mechanical behavior in human figures affords comic pleasure to the observer. At the same

time the composite theory would explain, through Berlyne's views, how such pleasure could be shared by one who creates comic figures. Where Bergson would argue that the comic is a consequence of "the mechanical and the living dovetailed into each other," Berlyne would add the insight that the mixture of these incongruent properties displays two eventually distinct aspects. The mechanically-encrusted or comic subject at first seems to be a human aberration. It seems human; but it is changing in grotesque fashion into objects animate or inanimate. It is threateningly strange and bears, initially, a certain surprise value which evokes orientation response increasing tension to a level of higher anxiety.[10] Eventually, the observer perceives the second aspect of the comic figure. He recognizes that the figure is hardly human at all, and that it is rigid, not variable. It was initially thought to be strange and unpredictable; but it is really characterized by a lack of the elasticity and of the variation which would evoke genuine surprise. The tension summoned to deal with the earlier surprise value of a strange and yet human-seeming phenomenon is not needed to address the "thing" exposed. Therefore, the tension is suddenly reduced into laughter or some other response signifying pleasure. Consider how, in a construct of the two theories, the words which are employed by Bergson to signify the comic aspect: rigidity, inelasticity, and automatism, signify, in Berlyne's vocabulary, those characteristics which at first induce, then subsequently relieve the tensions of fear and anxiety. The composite meaning of these terms is necessary to my discussion of what the comic in nonsense verse and drawings meant to Edward Lear.

Now, consider the application of this theory to Lear's work and personality. He was bothered greatly by congenital and other involuntary failings and the strange habits they produced. However, he discovered, somehow, through that relieving, healing instinct that teaches us to laugh at ourselves and others, that he could project his debilitating and frightening maladies into "figures" in drawing and verse. Lear's transposition of his maladies into his nonsense figures endowed the latter with "some rigidity or other," with living energy greatly encumbered by some "stupidly monotonous body," with a certain automatism "giving an impression of movement without life." The figures were objectifications of his weaknesses, and as objects, they were predictable, controllable. By virtue of the remarkable transformation that produces laughter, Lear's nervous and congenital failings, the ugliness, loneliness, and poverty so involuntary to his vital life, were, in his nonsense life which the paper life of his nonsense figures objectified, agents of predictability and control. Because the nonsense characters were only figures on paper, distanced from the flesh and blood, without that elasticity of body and variety of soul which elicit human sympathy and love, Lear's nonsense figures bore his maladies lightly. Or so it must have seemed to him because, confronting his anxieties in these forms, he was blessed with "anaesthesia of the heart." He could laugh at them, at himself in them, and do so with millions of others.

I have attempted to demonstrate with the theories of Bergson and Berlyne how that the comic can bring satisfaction not only to

those who witness it, but also to those who create it. The satisfaction could be said to reside in the experience of controlling or rising above human incidents and characteristics which in any form but the objective comic form would excite anxiety. Since Bergson gives little indication that the comic can give pleasure to its creator, it was necessary to demonstrate with Berlyne's theory how the comic brings satisfaction to its author, and furthermore, to explain Lear's motives in writing verse which was largely self-deprecating. Let it be noted that in his nonsense verse Lear deprecated only that part of his personality and environment which he believed to be involuntary, evil, and frightening. His voluntary self thereby annihilated what it could not control. Edward Lear's genius is to be greatly admired because his nonsense was amusing to others and a panacea to himself.

And now, what can Bergson's very graphic depictions of the comic do to prove the genius of the public and private effectiveness of Edward Lear's nonsense verse? Above all else, the application of Bergson's statements to Lear's work proves this one thing: that the limerick characters are a strange compound of humanity and "thingness." M. Bergson would say that their mechanical encrustation makes them humanly inferior and therefore objects of scornful laughter. This is enough to satisfy the question of the source and nature of our pleasure in Lear's nonsense. My theory on Edward Lear and his nonsense verse comes more clearly into the following terms. The nonsense figures are human because they possess their author's personal qualities; but inasmuch as they share his involuntary failings and spiritual malaise, they are also ugly, rigid, obtuse enough to be

possessed of a quality of "thingness." This quality allowed Lear to distance himself from them and from his weaknesses in them. It also protected him to a saving extent from the revealing identification of author and creation. Lear would have been himself vulnerable to the condescension of his readers were they allowed to sympathize with his nonsense "things" as people.

Perhaps the most striking and universal quality of the limerick figures is their likeness to puppets. Lear has conceived of a depersonalized personae, automations subject to the strange and distorting tugs of his own manipulation. As if in suspicion that his terrible anxieties when projected through pen to paper would become reincarnate in his nonsense figures, as if fearful they would exert there an influence as painful as was theirs in his own body, the artist Lear chose to constrain his creations by invisible strings. Of this function, which is at once restrictive and creative, Bergson notes:

> The child grows at play: he makes puppets grow, inspires them with life, and finally brings them to an ambiguous state in which, without ceasing to be puppets, they have not yet become human beings. [11]

Perhaps this explains the consistent balance of imaginative creativity and restraint in all of Lear's nonsense, for, while the nonsense beings are certainly animated, they are seldom more than jointed puppets. They lack the volition which lends an element of unpredictability to human beings. They are taken up by compulsions and forces outside themselves. While these forces are manifestly like those commanding the author's involuntary life, they are, in the nonsense, unmistakably at his finger-tip's command. In his nonsense, Lear has established that where the involuntary frenzy of the creation grows,

the control of the creator increases correspondingly.[12]

Examine the gestures of these creatures, beginning with the upper limbs. Their hands grasp with stiff doll-like inefficiency. Arms seem never to flex or bend. They have no elbows or wrists. Consequently, the upper limbs are almost always out of balance with the torso. They extend upwards, or outwards, or backwards in an absurdly imbalanced and perfectly matching uniformity. It is as if both limbs were operated by inefficient strings or moved by some inadequately geared mechanism which forces one arm to do exactly as the other.

The rest of the body is no less rigid however, and as might be suspected, the puppet-like quality shows in the hips and legs. There, rigidity is like a disease affecting the joints, one which is particularly discomfiting to figures in the classic, seated, comic pose. Their large, round bodies seem stuffed with some substance lighter than flesh, wood or sawdust perhaps, which is packed so tightly that there is no possibility of bending at the hips to sit. Lear's figures never fit comfortably into chairs in the soft, sagging human way. They seem always about to fall off. Such a fall would be calamitous if not pitiable, as there are no knees to flex with, and the toes are fixed, rigid, and pointing. But then for what matter: why should the toes not point and legs not lock stiffly to pivot? It is obvious from the drawings that the feet and legs need not support the bodies. Most bodies are hung by the arms or neck or held by the invisible puppeteer's strings at some point obviously behind and below dignity. Often the feet of the figures touch the ground at angles so disproportionate and wide that they

cannot be surmised to be giving balance. Such is the case with the old men from Ischia, Blackheath, Dunrose and West Dumpet, and the young ladies of Hull and Norway: all are caught in a precarious one-toed stance. Their obvious imbalance forces the imagination to provide them some extrinsic support. Others, like the young lady of Bute, the niece of the old man in a pew, the old man with a gong, and the old men of Whitehaven and Dunrose are more obviously suspended. Their stiff, straw-stuffed shapes are certainly incapable of jumping, but their feet float well above the ground.

In spite of the author's control the nonsense figures retain their magic. In their wildly suspended states they keep a strangely ambiguous quality of both thingness and humanity. Thing-like, they are pulled into contorted postures and strange proportions; but they react in human fashion. They register horror or surprise, indignation or pain, and, sometimes, they assume a stubborn indifference or idiotic resignation.

To supplement their doll-like or puppet-like qualities, the figures of Lear's nonsense share a dehumanizing ugliness. Almost without exception they flaunt incongruous features which make them humanly offensive.[13] Observing them, one becomes aware that their ugliness is primarily a matter of disproportion. They lack the balance and flexibility of human development and physical growth. They seem to have had considerable trouble with exaggerated or stunted growth of parts of their bodies or countenances. In the limerick drawings there is frequent recurrence of a nose that has grown too long, of fish-like or bulging eyes, of gigantic or stunted heads, of cavernous mouths, and of weak or extended chins. Such

positively or negatively exaggerated features are comic to the view of Henri Bergson insofar as they are abberrations of a mechanism too faulty to regulate growth. Such irresponsibly faulty and inhuman developments create in the beholder a feeling of superiority. They tend to evoke the social corrective, derisive laughter.

There are noteworthy exceptions to the generally comic protagonists of the limerick drawings. Among them are the adept young lady of Troy, who has fine, proportionate features; the calm and serene old persons of Sheen and Bar; the magnanimous young person of Janina; the judicious young person of Bantry; and the wonderfully resourceful old person of Sparta. These characters have by far the most attractive appearance and the truest human dimensions of all the limerick figures. It is no coincidence that the predominantly human figures should be so by virtue of their flexibility,their resources and their wise resignation, while those figures without these virtues are all quite ugly. In fact, where the primary subject of the drawing is a truly human, balanced personality, the secondary characters are often made to look ridiculous by comparison.

There is ample proof in Lear's drawings that human figures become comic as they become things, and that flexibility, proportion and presence of mind, all socially desirable attributes are, in some degree, lacking in comic figures. The corollary to this evidence is Bergson's proposition that laughter is a form of social correction directed towards mechanical behavior in human beings or in situations and objects which bear the human stamp.

One more observation can be made on the ugliness in the limerick drawings and, again, it is in Bergsonian terms. Some of the ugliness is due to the odd fashions worn by the limerick figures. Fantastic bonnets and runcible hats, cumbersome clogs and creaky shoes, sacks and feathers and fish-like frills adorn the limerick _personae_ much to the disgust or chagrin of "the people." There comes a point in consideration, however, where it is impossible to dissociate the adornment and the adorned. The comic of fashion, _de jour_ becomes the comic _de facto_. Hats become heads and feathers hair; wigs become beards, and beards vestments or coats. Fish-like frills seem a part of the anatomy of the wearers. Coats, vests, boots and other apparel have power in the drawings to impose upon their wearers the appearance of unmistakably grotesque creatures. Thus the bearers of such apparel metamorphose into balloons and balls, birds, fish, beetles, and dogs. Bergson would argue that the laughter with which we react to these grotesques is informed by the same spirit which leads us to laugh at absurd fashions. Implicit in the laughter, he might argue, is a belief that these figures are really men in disguise. They have put on, or assumed, noses too long or legs too short, misshapen mouths or eyes. There are no bursting bodies, only stuffed clothes, not black but blackened skin, no genuine giant beards. In effect, the laughter is the result of an easier way of dealing with or explaining earlier, frightful incongruities. In the moment of comic laughter it is as if we are convinced that the human (for certainly there is humanity in the drawings) can tear off the disguise. We feel that beneath the frighteningly grotesque masks there is

something human, flexible, proportionate. We laugh believing perhaps that the laughter will coax the human out of hiding. Or is it the reverse? Perhaps we refuse to recognize the human at all and insist that in the appearance of deformed and ugly humanity the real disguise is humanity. Perhaps we discount the possibility of human life and volition in the nonsense figure. We laugh at a thing we once suspected was human. Whenever Lear's nonsense serves to evoke laughter, to chastise the "thingness" in humans, or to empty the "humanity" from things, it invariably bears the features of the grotesque. A closer study of the grotesque may at once prove Lear's skill in displacing his anxieties into his verse and account for our enjoyment of the nonsense.

CHAPTER IV

THE GROTESQUE IN EDWARD LEAR'S NONSENSE VERSE

The word "grotesque" is generally thought to have originated as a term descriptive of fanciful murals in which human and animal motifs were combined with foliage and floral decoration. Such murals were found in the chambers (grotte) of Roman buildings excavated about 1500, particularly in the Domus Aurea of Nero.[1] The original Italian forms la grottesca, grottesco, derived from grotta and ultimately from the Greek word for caves. The early French form crotesque was displaced in the late seventeenth century by the form grotesque, which appeared also in English by 1640. In The Grotesque in English Literature, Arthur Clayborough elaborates at length on the word's semantic development. He summarizes with:

> The word grotesque, originating as a technical term designating a late Roman style of decoration, thus becomes applicable to whatever is incongruous with the accepted norm, in life or art. In ordinary colloquial use it is commonly pejorative, associated with the unintentionally ridiculous or the monstrous. In critical use, it may be employed to describe any style of art which deviates from conventional patterns. As has already been seen, the primary sense in both these extended uses of the word, whether as a noun or adjective, is that of incongruity with the real or the normal. (Clayborough, 16)

Clayborough regards the word "grotesque" in two senses: first, as a noun referring to the "unintentionally monstrous," and, as an adjective descriptive of a style more or less consciously achieved by way of incongruities. It is with the latter definition that I am concerned - that is, with the analysis of a grotesque style in

the nonsense of Edward Lear. Clayborough evidently feels it is important to distinguish between the grotesque as a style in art and literature and the grotesque as a fact or element of the world external to literature. He does so because he must draw from other writers on the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser in particular, descriptions of the grotesque in both contexts. For the purposes of this paper, this distinction between the two contexts of the grotesque should be made. Where the grotesque is the result of a style in art or literature, it usually signifies that the author or artist has controlled and resolved objects and experiences which were monstrous or uncanny. This distinction can be applied to Wolfgang Kayser's explorations in The Grotesque in Art and Literature New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957. Kayser brings to light several features of the grotesque which are dominant in Edward Lear's nonsense.

The first feature of Kayser's grotesque is that of estrangement or alienation.

> Several contradictory feelings are aroused by the grotesque: we smile at the deformations but are appalled by the horrible and monstrous elements of such. The basic feeling is one of surprise and horror, an agonizing fear in the presence of a world which breaks apart and remains inaccessible. (Kayser, 31)

The nonsense of Lear seldom employs a grotesque as sinister as that suggested to Kayser's view. It does have a chthonic side which is in fact suggested by the characteristic incongruities of the grotesque; but this side is seldom seen in nonsense, or, if seen, is quickly resolved in laughter. Kayser has referred to the estrangement of human forms effected upon our world by forces outside ourselves. The consequence of this transformation is surprise and horror.

But on the other hand, when the artist himself is creating a world of estranged objects in his art, as Lear does in his nonsense, the grotesque signifies that the artist has liberated himself of fears and taken control of forces which would otherwise produce anxiety. In Chapter III of this paper I demonstrated with reference to Henri Bergson and Charles Berlyne that the initial response to the incongruous or the grotesque in nonsense, which I called there an orientation response, was not unlike fear or even horror. This response, it was explained, is generally resolved, through objectification, into laughter.[2] When the grotesque is exerted upon us we react in surprise and horror because we have become subject to some involuntary force. Where the grotesque is projected by the artist onto the landscape of his art, there is a measure of control and will afforded him which can account for the resolution of surprise into laughter. Thus grotesque objects which to Kayser symbolize the alienating and estranging powers of the grotesque,

> a recurrence of animals, vermin, bats, strange night-creatures not accessible to man, plant-world motifs, enlarging and microscopic human and animal and plant combinations, tools which unfold a dangerous life of their own, knives now machines, the mechanical object itself alienated by being brought to life, the human being alienated by being deprived of it, human bodies reduced to puppets, masks taking over the function of faces, (Kayser, 183)

have symbolized in my review of Lear's nonsense his successful attempt to project, estrange and resolve into laughter his foremost anxieties. Where the grotesque objects occur, Kayser detects characteristic processes of alienation:

fusion of spacial realisms, abolition of the law of statics, loss of identity, distortion of natural size and shape, suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order. (Kayser, 185)

Kayser attributes these processes when found in the external world to some "apocalyptic beast," the "ghostly it." But in the world of art, the world created and partially controlled by the artist, similar processes are tendentious and positive. Still, there is no doubting that the grotesques of nonsense are inspired by the demonic in the external world. The word "apocalyptic beasts" seems particularly suitable for the source of Lear's nonsense grotesques, since he named one of the factors which drove him to his nonsense "The Terrible Demon."[3]

The grotesque in art does not banish once and for all the "terrible demons" in the world. Lear's nonsense encourages us to laugh at a simplified or caricatured aspect of the grotesque. Laughter is at best a partial and momentary response. The nonsense grotesque exists primarily as an expression of "a failure to orient to the physical universe." (Kayser, 185) Unlike tragedy, the grotesque suggests no meaning in a meaningless and absurd world. But who can read Lear's nonsense without greatly admiring the play with the absurd which the grotesque allows him? One must concur with K.H. Stroble's view "that only the most courageous can fuse horror and humor into grotesque play." He continues:

Humor and terror are twin children of their mother imagination, since both are suspicious of mere facts and distrust any rationalistic explanation of the world. Both deal sovereignly with life by refashioning, exaggerating, and stylizing certain of its aspects .

> Who can deny that especially in these artists the pleasure of immersing oneself in horror and of fighting with the demon results from a maximum of health, courage and bravado? And that in their works horror is joined with its brother humor? Occasionally the humor operates by itself, while at other times it is united with horror, a fusion that produces something exceedingly strange and precious -- the grotesque. (Kayser, 140)

Kayser advises the reader that grotesque play with the absurd is dangerous as well as pleasurable. He cites Geothe's lines:

> Wer heiter in Absurde spielt/Den wird auch wohl das Absurde ziemen,

to argue that play with the absurd in the grotesque,

> may begin in a gay and carefree manner. But it may also carry the player away, deprive him of his freedom, and make him afraid of the ghosts which he has so frivolously invoked. And now no helper comes to his rescue. The creators of grotesques have no advice that they can follow. They transgress the limits which the aged Goethe set to their art. (Kayser, 66)

If we believe Goethe, the artist's grotesques furnish no complete liberation from the ominous grotesques in his external world. Thus all that is furnished to Lear in his nonsense is a momentary liberation in laughter, and there is an inclination in this laughter, especially when it becomes less objective, to become bitter, satirical. The grotesque in literature must be envisioned therefore as only a stepping stone to liberation.

With the assistance of authorities, Clayborough and Kayser, I have observed two of the aspects of the grotesque: the grotesque is an alienated or a changed world; the grotesque is a play with the absurd. And both of these aspects are features of Lear's nonsense.

Earlier in this paper I took exception to exclusions of areas of Edward Lear's verse made by Miss Sewell in her delineation of the nonsense landscape. One of her reasons for exclusions was that,

to her mind, nonsense could not partake of changes and shifts into dream-like fusions. Such a distinction excludes from "nonsense proper" a great deal of the "Nonsense Botany" and the limericks themselves since they represent changed or changing forms and are characterized by the estranged or alienated aspect of the grotesque. It is intriguing that Lear's "Nonsense Botany" represents so closely the definition of the earlier grotesques of the Roman grotte: "the combination of human and animal life with foliage and floral decoration." While Lear's drawings are much simpler in line than the fanciful murals of the grotte and are therefore less frightening, they still demonstrate the change of organisms into alien shapes. Lear's fusings are simpler but more exuberant than those of the ancients. His grotesques range from the eccentric flowerings of human forms: "Phattfacia Stupenda" "Manypeeplia Upsidownia" "Queeriflora Babyoides;" to the metamorphosis of animals and plants in "Pollybirdia Singularis," "Barkia Howlaloudia," "Crabbia Horrida;" to the unprecedented grotesque union of vegetable forms with insects in "Sophtsluggia Glutinosa," "Nasticreechia Krorluppia," and with things in "Knutmigratia Simplice," and "Minspysia Deliciosa." The wit-work in the pseudomorphic names is as delightfully transparent as the simplistic, uncluttered lines of the drawing. Both direct the tension of incongruities into laughter. Miss Sewell observed aptly that the nonsense drawings are carefully controlled; but these drawings also feature a wide and varied range of grotesque forms.

The limericks as well are filled with dozens of figures which represent a fusion of bird, animal and insect forms with the human. All these fusions are more humorous than horrifying. Although the figures themselves display shock or horror, they are represented in such simple, objective lines that they preserve the viewer from any lasting experience of horror. They are, as Miss Sewell would have them, remarkably well controlled; but they are nevertheless fusions. Predominant among them are grotesque figures whose estranged forms are generic to the experience of their creator. In almost every case human forms are changed to suggest the danger of playing with the absurd. The human forms are distorted into grotesque assimilations of the animals with which they associate. Viewing the predominance of bird-men and bird-women in this assemblage, one cannot help but think how Lear spent hours drawing the birds of the Knowsley menagerie and the parrots of Family Psittacidae. Though he worked until his sight was failing, no doubt his mind was active, storing itself with images which would later furnish his nonsense for grotesque play with the absurd. Brian Reade has noted the sportive grotesque of

> the illustrations to the written nonsenses [which] are often cliches of a skilled draughtsman, not much interested in human figure as such, but with considerable experience in drawing birds and animals -- birds especially. When his hand was left to itself it seems to have sought the lines of least resistance in the forms of amiable harpies, sometimes with bird's legs, and usually with vestigal wings functioning as arms.
>
> Lear himself said that Madame de Bunsen 'would never allow her grandchildren to look at my books, inasmuch as their distorted figures would injure the children's sense of the beautiful.[4]

Lear was far too critical to fail to realize the absurdity of the tediously painful task of sketching birds and too sensitive not to

rebel at the fact that to survive, he was forced to draw. Consequently, nearly a dozen old people and young ladies of the nonsense, who consort, as he did, with birds, seem to have become one of a feather with them. Lear implies it is absurd to play with birds since, in his nonsense, people can neither feed, draw, or even contemplate birds without sprouting feathery breasts, plumes or tails, or growing stork-like in the legs, or owl-like in the eyes. There is danger in play with the absurd and in the imagination's creation of the grotesque, for the player becomes the absurd; the creator becomes grotesque himself. The artist who plays with the absurd can avoid its seductive powers only through a controlled projection of his own absurdities onto paper where it is objectified into laughter or art. Lear was fully aware of his danger. His own recollections of the absurd in his life he objectified in the paper lives of his nonsense figures. There we can see human absurdities cast into the grotesque shapes and habits of fishes, frogs, and bugs by Lear's playful, associative machinations.

It is interesting to gauge how far Lear is willing to go in his play with the absurd. Absurd play or play with grotesques is essentially an experimentation with objects and ideas which possess a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities. Unless the player maintains sovereignty over the grotesques that "playfullness" is "constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror." It seems to be a law of the grotesques that they become more terrifying as they become more subtle and more real.[6] Lear's grotesques are less terrifying where the habits and limbs of

human figures appear animal-like than where the figures are grotesque by way of distortion or hysteric exaggeration of human heads, trunks and noses. In the former we can easily resolve the absurdity, easily convince ourselves that such a creature is impossible, while in the latter we recognize the possible and implicit threat to our own bodies. There is a possibility that there are the seeds of some involuntary process in our bodies which will result in the terrifying distortion of limbs, features, or personality.[7] Consequently the deformed human features of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo make him more frightening than the Quangle-Wangle, who, though he has a consciousness, is otherwise remarkably like a tree, a bird, and a lizard. It is important to note that human beings appearing like things, animals, or puppets in their vestures are less terrifying than those who are experiencing an organic transformation into animals.[8] Somewhere in the grotesque shunting of people into things there exists a point of maximum horror. This is where the human is most intensely real and most intensely threatened by an impinging world, where the involuntary change from humanness to thingness is nearly, but not quite, completed.[9] The power of the grotesque is intensified by a fullness of detail which makes both the human and the aberration very convincing. When it is most difficult for us to resolve either for humanness or thingness, we cannot draw back from the grotesque into objectivity and laughing relief. Absurdity in the grotesque is a measure of the convincing nature, the seeming or seductive truth of its incongruous mixture. When the play with the absurd becomes assimilative[10] and subjective, then it becomes extremely dangerous. The player

cannot escape from the game; the artist becomes the absurd.

Lear seldom ventures this far. In his nonsense the absurd is seldom so subtle or convincing that he is fully caught up in it. The spare, economic lines of his drawings and verses are obviously caricatures of the demonic world. He takes care always to paint the devil with the aspect of a fool.[11] Miss Sewell's observation that Lear's nonsense is a controlled game would appear to be correct; and yet her argument that he was not deeply involved with the game is, I feel, superficial. I have indicated earlier that he felt he had to control the nonsense, for into it he had projected his most debilitating fears. He was able to take sovereignty over the demonic in his life only as he objectified it in his nonsense. Had he represented his absurdities in any less laughable fashion, he would not have overcome his failings and fears even for a moment. He would have been as deeply involved in them as in life. The control in his nonsense must therefore be a correlative of his vital commitment to the nonsense verse, the laughter in it a correlative of his deadly seriousness.

I have implied the danger of play with the absurd in the grotesque and argued that Lear saved himself from a submergence in the shifting, tenuous realities of the grotesque by forcing his imagination into simpler, controlled forms of the grotesque. The most remarkable quality of Lear's play with the grotesque, that which makes it less frightening to himself and others, less a revelation of darkness and guilt, is its childishness. This second feature of the grotesque, the protective childish guise of the

chthonic in grotesque play with the absurd, must be examined in Edward Lear's nonsense verse. To reinforce what has been said of the childish aspect in the grotesque and to shape this discussion towards the emphasis of this paper on the satisfying element of the grotesque, I will refer to Sigmund Freud's statements on "Word Pleasure and Pleasure in Nonsense."[12]

The pleasure in play with the grotesque or nonsensical word-formulations Freud traces to the infantile habit of "experimenting playfully" with words. The child, says Freud, "connects words without regard for their meaning in order to obtain pleasure from the rhyme and rhythm." After having established with reference to K. Groos that the pleasure comes in part from the recognitions of recurrences in the rhyme and rhythm, Freud observes that this pleasure is of the sort gradually suppressed by socialization.

> Gradually, the child is deprived of this pleasure until only the senseful connection of words is allowed him. But even in later life there is still a tendency to overstep the acquired restrictions in the use of words, a tendency which manifests itself in disfiguring the same by definite appendages, and in changing their forms by means of certain contrivances or efforts which reappear also among the insane of a certain category. (Freud, 717)

He finally accounts for the pleasure of nonsense in its saving of psychic energy hitherto expended in restraining the childish play with words.[13] According to Freud then, nonsense does afford pleasure, and it may be assumed that the pleasurable or grotesque play with words in Lear's nonsense will be remarkable for the following: infantile characteristics in the nonsense drawings, and an almost complete subversion of sense to rhythm and rhyme in the verse.

One very important reason for the childish simplicity of Lear's nonsense drawings has been explained with reference to his control of the horrible grotesque in them. Simplicity is in this respect tendentious. But another, what Freud would call "harmless" simplicity can be found in the drawings. It lies in the apparent carelessness of the drawings and in the child-like rejection of the demands of reason for order and perspective. Lear's drawings must have all sprung from the verses and were evidently scratched off hurredly in ink. But neither of these considerations accounts for the seeming amateurish simplicity of limerick drawings like that of the white pigs belonging to the uncle of the Young Lady of Bute, or of the Young Lady of Turkey, or of the tree frequented by the Old Man of Dundee, or of the fish and the Young Lady of Wales. In these and other drawings the missing limbs, unfortunate shadings, blots, shapeless and incongruous scribblings, and the surprising absence of detail cannot be taken for anything but deliberate slips or omissions of the pen. It must be agreed that comic drawings generally must be simple in order to focus the reader's attention upon one aspect or feature of a situation. The rules of caricature and of the comic of motion demand simplicity.[14] But nearly every cartoonist or caricaturist exhibits a certain grace or economy in his simplicity and works out a system of symmetrical and predictable forms. Seldom elsewhere is seen the deliberate disproportion, inconsistency, and ugliness that there is in Lear's nonsense drawings. They reflect the perverse delight of grotesque play, the play of a draughtsman

who in his landscape and bird drawings was committed to skillful and painstaking verisimilitude.

Also childlike and remarkable in a landscape artist is the disregard of perspective. Lear's nonsense drawings can be seen to be a regression to that infantile stage of perception where only two dimensions are recognized. Almost without exception, the nonsense figures perform their grotesque antics upon a single flat-lined horizon. Those who will not be constrained to this tight-roped plane are suspended in blank space. Only objects, or people reduced to objects, seem to be privileged to deepening perspectives. Tables and chairs have it by virtue of their legs; and rows of people, usually cousins, sons, or daughters are often lined up into infinity. The general absence of the third dimension effects another strangeness: persons or objects which, it would seem, were drawn smaller to appear more distant than others are, according to the rules of proportion, smaller but equidistant to other similar types of figures.[15] When childish make-believe transparencies are featured in drawings of water, mountains, and trees, it is often difficult to tell what physical point of view the artist takes to the picture. Sometimes he seems to confuse his view of objects with that of the subjects of his drawing. Like the Young Lady of Portugal he sees fish as big as schooners blissfully skimming the water. He discovers with the young man of Nepal two rather indignant sunken ducks. His omnipotent eye, vested with the child's magical powers, pierces oceans, and trees, and even craters in search of its subjects, and reduces the most solid substances to cross-sections.[16]

It often happens that principal subjects of the verses appear dominant to other, related objects, in the drawings. The child-like association of importance with size operates freely in the limericks, openly subverting the laws of proportion. If one feature of the nonsense drawing is more focal to the subject of the verse, then it is generally inflated so that its emphasis in drawing is proportionate to its meaning in the verse; its size and detail are disproportionate to its real or conventional relationship to other features of the drawing. No other reasoning can explain why in the nonsense drawings some subjects are larger than others, nor why features and limbs of the body which are the focal point of the verses are exaggerated in the drawings. The "Old Man of the South" needs an equally sizeable head to accommodate his immoderate mouth. Substances consumed, brandy, soy, soup, and senna are represented in the drawings by the grossly enlarged vessels which hold them. Whatever demands are made by the absurdity of the verse are met with childish generosity in the drawings and at great sacrifice to realism, perspective, and proportion.

The vigorous, child-like perversion of Lear's nonsense is more noticeable in the limericks since they are almost always drawings of persons. There seems to have been something behind Lear's hand which refused to draw persons accurately. Even in Lear's landscapes persons are vaguely or amateurishly sketched. Lear spent some time and deliberate effort to prepare himself to depict the human body and countenance in a realistic or sublime fashion.[17] But he never did portray the human form with the photographic reality

he used to display birds and landscapes. His humans are, in his drawings, invariably less than human, invariably comic and grotesque. Could this fact be attributed to his failure to orient himself to the forces residing in his own physical body? Certainly the paucity of realistic human drawings reinforces what has been said about his need to objectify into simple, comic forms the flesh and failings it is heir to.

The second principle of the childish or grotesque play with words is the annihilation of sense by rhythm and rhyme. Miss Sewell gives emphasis to the controlling nature of rhyme and rhythm in nonsense, arguing that they give check to the dream tendencies of images in verse and in some ways assist sense. I would note that the strict regularities of rhythm and rhyme are distortions not only of the sense of verse but also of its flexibility. Rigidity in versification produces a perverse and comic effect as surely as it does in human behavior. Strict rhyme and meter are the structural grotesques of Lear's verse. There comes a point in versification where rigidity serves not so much to control as to subvert. This, I propose, can be shown of the limerick.

Essayist Eric Partridge notes in Here There and Everywhere, 162, that Lear follows generally the pattern of the five-line limerick defined by Webster, "a nonsense poem of five anapestic lines, of which lines one, two and five are three feet and rhyme, and lines two and four are two feet and rhyme." "Lear," says Partridge, "follows the pattern, except that he runs lines three and four together and thus effects both an internal rhyme and four lines instead

of five."[18] The following observations might be added to those of Partridge to stress the limited variations in the limerick verse. Catalexis is a possible feature of all lines, except in line one where it is certain. The feminine ending is characteristic of lines one, two, four, and only occasionally of line three. There is a cesura in each third line, following the second anapest. One line seldom differs from another except in these ways: the extra anapest and censura in line three, the addition of an unaccented syllable to the end of lines one, two or four, the truncation of one unaccented syllable from the beginning of any line. The rhythmic patterns are so rigid that in all the limericks there are few variations. There are in the first lines only three variations; in lines two twice as many; in lines three, four variations; and in lines four, five variations. The ungainly galloping rhythm of the anapestic line suggests some freedom, as does the surprising awkwardness of the extra or truncated syllables. Their combined effect however, is to establish throughout the limerick the impression of an inescapable rush to nowhere. Any meaning or sense which cannot fit into this pattern or maintain the galloping gait must be forsaken, abandoned as the child in his excited pleasure-seeking abandons the plodding, reasonable adult. Unlike the witty limerick which absolves its initial nonsense with some "sense in nonsense" or some "jest," however rude or low that climax may be, the Learian limerick brings the reader back to the beginning.[19] Almost always, the last line reverts to the foolish "old man" or "young person" who had begun the limerick; or it returns to the place of the beginning, so that

all one can do is begin again. There is no sensible way to resolve oneself out of a Learian limerick, as there most certainly is with others; but of course, this is to be expected of nonsense which will not surrender itself to anything but an absurd play with words and which delights in the grotesque subversion of sense and meaning.

There are places in the limericks where Lear could meet the demands of rhythm with a certain amount of ease and grace. But consider what he does to settle the syllables of the adjectives in the verse. He attaches to his poor subjects cumbersome and delightfully ill-matched modifiers, excusing himself by stating, tongue in cheek: "Proper and exact 'epithets' always were impossible to me, as my thoughts are ever in advance of my words."[20] His excuse is not convincing. Few could compose in haste more "umbrageously" perverse adjectives than those furnished the old person of Rye,

> Who went up to town on a fly;
> But they said, "if you cough, you are safe to fall off!
> You abstemious old person of Rye."

There is a perverse and grotesque genius at work upon the "valuable person of Bray," the "extatic Young Lady of Wales," the "turbid old man of Toulouse," and the "luminous person of Barnes." It takes care and cultivation of habits "scroobious and strange" to cast in "promiscuous oration" such creatures as "Fizzgiggious Fish," "Scroobious Snakes," "Dolomphious Ducks," "Perpendicular Pollys," "Runcible Ravens," and "Obsequious Ostriches."

A close examination of the rhyme in the limerick brings to view the fact that it is an even stronger subverter of sense than is rhythm. Lines one, two, and four of the limerick almost invariably

end in perfect rhymes, more often feminine than masculine and occasionally extending into triple-syllabic rhymes. Of all four limerick lines, only the third has an independent end-rhyme, and this is committed to an internal rhyme. However, where one might expect some relationship of rhyme to reason, some correspondence of sound to sense, there is no such concession in Lear's work. Barnet's Dictionary of Literary Terms, suggests of rhyme: "It is, presumably, pleasant in itself; it suggests order; and it also may be related to meaning, for it brings two words sharply together, often implying a relationship, as, for example, Pope's 'throne' and 'alone'. (p. 93)" One may look in vain for a "meaningful" relationship between such closely rhyming words in Lear's work as: "Jamaica-Quaker," "Thermopylae-properly," "likely-quickly," "Haugue-vague," "Dutton-button," "Deal-heel." There is of course a relationship of sense between the rhyme ending the first and last lines of the limerick: in all but one of two dozen limericks, these words are identical. But this perfect matching is inevitably frustrating to sense. It allows the reader's thoughts to go nowhere but back to the beginning; and what sense is there in that?

It follows that rigidity in rhyme forces meaning into a degree of predictability. Consequently, line one of the limerick must always establish one meaning, the name or place of the person of the limerick; line two must identify his outstanding characteristics; line three describes his eccentric behavior; line four invariably re-initiates the whole experience. Perhaps the reason for the ascendency of rhyme over sense is that the nonsense verse takes its inspiration

from rhyme rather than reason. Emile Cammaerts suggests this in his discussion of the nursery rhyme, which he sees as progenitor to nonsense verse.

> One of the tests of good poetry -- I mean, of course, serious poetry-- is that the rhyme should be suggestive and original while remaining the perfect servant of the thought. There is no more severe criticism of a poet than to question the spontaneity of his rhyming power. All his words must obey his inspiration, without being subservient to it.
>
> Practically every nursery rhyme shows a deliberate contempt of this rule. The rhyme, not the thought, becomes the source of inspiration, and the singer builds the story around it. The rhymester sings the first line evidently in search of some grotesque image, and the rhyme helps him to find it. (Cammaerts, 41)

Why does the nonsense poetry take inspiration from the rhymes of his verse to ignore the rules of reason and sense? Why, to take and give pleasure, of course.

> There is no liberty which the poet will not take. The more liberties he takes, the better his nonsense. He uses a perfect <u>orgy</u> of refrains. (underlining mine) (Cammaerts, 51)

Lear's nonsense alphabets often exude the licentuousness described by Cammaerts. They employ a "perfect orgy" of refrains: in pretending to be instructive of the ABC's; but they have misspellings and exuberances to make them subversive of sensible instruction. A typical example of such subversion in every "Nonsense Alphabet" is Lear's child-like infatuation with "X" and King Xerxes. He must have inspired childish imaginations with his permissive and grotesque refrains:

```
                X
X was once a great King Xerxes
      Xerxy
      Perxy
      Turxy
      Xerxy
  Linxy  Lurxy
Great King Xerxes
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X was King Xerxes,
Who more than all Turks is
Renown'd for his fashion
Of fury and passion.
X!
Angry old Xerxes

The Excellent Double-extra XX
Imbibing King Xerxes, who lived a
Long while ago.

X was King Xerxes, whom
Papa much wished to know;
But this he could not do, because
Xerxes died long ago.

Is it any wonder that father might have wished to know him but couldn't? Xerxes died long ago for him. Only the child, and Lear were at liberty to have the infantile pleasure of knowing Xerxes.

It must be noted that the pleasure reflected in Lear's grotesque play in the nonsense is a further argument for the involvement of author and work. The evidence of this pleasure which has been supplied in these last pages is contradictory to Miss Sewell's argument that Lear was detached from his nonsense. Although she makes original and sound observations of the controlling influence of rhyme, and meter, and other disintegrating agents of nonsense, Miss Sewell neglects to look beyond them to deeper sources of nonsense. She does not note the tendency of the grotesque to effect at least a momentary unity of horror and humor in nonsense. Certainly, she could give no indication of the pleasure in the childish play with the grotesque since pleasure is perhaps the greatest unifier of author and work. She does, however, indicate in her last chapter, "Will You, Won't You?", p. 192, that a closer examination than she

has chosen to make would hint at a unity between nonsense, "the dance," and the nonsense author, "the dancer." Had she examined further, she may have noted that the very systematic relationship of rhythm and rhyme is in fact an anti-system built to destroy the conventional systems of reason and sense.

Emile Cammaerts seems to have examined nonsense deeply enough to suggest that, in Lear's nonsense verse, not even the rules of rhyme itself were final; but, in fact, were inevitably subservient to the will or fancy of the nonsense poet.

> The rhyme of the nursery does, in fact, everything that a sensible rhyme ought never to do. It leads the poet in the most unlikely places, or crawls at his feet like an abject slave. (Cammaerts, 42)

Rhyme and rhythm exert control in Lear's nonsense; but they are sovereign only to sense and reason. Both rhyme and rhythm are subverted in the nonsense by the spirit of play. The game, or the idea of play cannot be independent of the player as a source of nonsense. Though it is the union of game and player which creates for the reader the sense of the grotesque, this sense must be traced to an awareness in the mind of the author of nonsense verse. In the grotesque distortion of sense by versification and the final subversion of versification itself, Lear expresses his superiority to sense and reason and, finally, to language. Although Lear's subversion of rhythm is featured in numerous cases where words are forced to assume extra syllables or displaced accents, his superiority to rhythm is more obviously demonstrated in the awkward anapestic meters and truncated lines of the limericks. He asserts his power over rhyme by arbitrating such imperfect rhymes as "Smyrna" and

"burn her," "Lucca" and "forsook her," "Columbia" and "beer," "Cadiz" and "Ladies," "Lady" and "steady," "Wrekin" and "creaking." He takes a callous joy in the audacious versification of the Old Man of Leghorn's misadventure, "But quickly snapt up he, was once by a puppy." He brings meter and rhyme into conflict in "The Duck and the Kangaroo:"

> "And would probably give me the roo
> Matiz!" said the Kangaroo.

In the inverted world of nonsense, such distortions of sound are really "sound distortions." They require no apology, no more than that given by the deliberately imperfect rhymster,

> [the] old person of Wick
> Who said, 'Tick-a-Tic, Tick-a-Tick;
> Chickabee, Chickabaw,' and he said nothing <u>more</u>.

Nothing more needs to be said. In the nonsense drawing, the old man has just made his absurd and abrupt statement to an imploring audience. On his face is a look of benign resignation and superiority. He has given the final answer: The language of thought is ultimately nonsense. Those who will accept the old man as an advocate of Lear will understand what Kayser says of Lear and Christian Morgenstern, cultivators of "the higher nonsense."

> Lear and Morgenstern also agree in the use of poetic conventions in order to produce a tension between form and content; meter, rhythm, sound, rhyme, and refrain are fully exploited with the aim of enhancing the striking contrast between words and meaning" (Kayser, 151)

While the "higher nonsense ... appears at first to be the work of an untrammelled imagination," says Kayser, "there is no such thing as an untrammelled imagination." He argues that the grotesque in nonsense goes beyond the innocent play of childhood, to:

a fight against the duplicity of language, against its inability to lead to reality demonstrated.

. . . . . .

In 1907 Morgenstern had written: "The older I grow, the more one word comes to dominate my thinking -- grotesque." We now know what he meant by the grotesque. Morgenstern wanted to shake our confidence in language and the image of the world which it supplies. He does so by using the principles of language itself -- such as word formation, metaphor, rhyme, similie, intensification -- for the creation of absurdities. "Destroy language, and, with it, all things and concepts. The rest is silence." (Kayser, 155)

These findings disclose one last feature of the grotesque in Lear's nonsense. The grotesque is, in part, his protest against the "inability of language to lead to" certain deeply felt "realities." Edward Lear was, almost on account of his many friendships, a profoundly lonely man. He could seldom broach in companionship the desires and frustrations which he confided in his letters. Nowhere, except in his diaries and journals, did he confess the problems most responsible for his loneliness: his epilepsy and his homosexuality.[21] Even there, he spoke of them indirectly. The epilepsy he referred to as "the demon" or "the terrible demon," or he represented it with crosses.[22] The homosexuality is only hinted at in a passage in his journals which was subsequently inked out. He was forced to define the greater part of his friendships in words, and words failed him miserably. At moments when he was in greatest need of sympathy and concern, he called out in words which reduced his pleas to an impotent wailing or nonsensical gibberish.[23] It was characteristic of his letters that whenever they approached a delicate or feeling subject, they lapsed into nonsense.[24]

Those who affected him most were in no position to accept in words or any other forms, the truth about his relationship to them.

It is suspected that it was Franklin Lushington himself, the very object of Lear's homosexual yearnings, who scribbled from the Lear diaries in his possession the passages alluding to Lear's guilt in masturbation and his homosexuality.[25]

While Lear's contortion and subversion of words and meaning in nonsense and in letters may not have been as severe and tendentious as Morgenstern's attempt "to kill language," certainly it can be interpreted as his gentle reminder to others of the frustrating guilt and embarrassment which thwarted his full share of the love and understanding of others.[26]

CHAPTER V

THE SUBLIME IN EDWARD LEAR'S NONSENSE VERSE

I have written of the tendentious nature of the grotesque in Lear's nonsense, of its power to capture and resolve, momentarily, anxieties which were the consequences of his congenital failings. At its strongest moments in the nonsense verse the grotesque represents the artist's striking out against ugliness and death, perhaps the most involuntary of all forces in life. But even in its most tendentious resolution of ugliness, fear, and guilt into comic laughter, the grotesque furnishes no more than temporary relief. And there are occasions in the nonsense of Edward Lear when some more permanent relief seems implicit, moments when ugly features are resolved into something more lasting than laughter and more gracious than the grotesque. This type of impression belongs, predominantly, to Lear's nonsense songs.

Miss Sewell noted a unity in the songs which induced her to exclude them from "nonsense proper."[1] This kind of unity, she said, is the consequence of the recognizable presence of the author in his verse and an indication of beauty as well. It has been demonstrated in this paper that a great deal of Lear's personality and presence is recognizable in all his nonsense, and that this can be no justifiable reason for excluding any of his verse from the nonsense category. But while I must disagree with Miss Sewell on

the exclusion of the songs from successful nonsense, I must take heed of her discernment of a special harmony peculiar to the nonsense songs.

Perhaps the most obvious harmonious quality is that implied in their names: they are songs. They are longer than the limericks and have, by virtue of their lyrical quality, a greater freedom of meter and melody. These features,plus the frequent refrains, and the ever-present reference to the dance give the songs a more extensive unity than the limericks. Miss Sewell herself has admitted the power of the dance to unite both the artist and his creation, and nowhere in the nonsense is the dance more frequent than in the songs.[2] There are, of course, dancers in the limericks, but fewer by percentage than those in the songs. Their dances are, for the most part, friskier: they consist of awkward leaping, or hornpipes, jigs or quadrilles. The ordinary folk of the limericks find the dancers vexing or unpleasant. They resent the eccentric toe-dance of the old man of Melrose and the red-faced compulsion of the old person of Ischia. Though it is said that the old person of Filey "danced perfectly well, to the sound of a bell," the chagrined expression on the face of his acquaintance belies a certain smugness in the old fellow's romp.

The songs, on the other hand, make for freer and more gracious movement. The duck and the Kangaroo range "the whole world three times around." They dance for pleasure moreso than relief:

And who so happy, -- O! Who
As the duck and the kangaroo?

The mice in "Calico Pie" can both drink and be merry.

Calico Ban,
The little Mice ran
To be ready in time for tea,
Flippity flup,
They drank it all up,
And danced in the cup,--

There is no dance in the limericks to match the exquisite moonlit pas de deux of "The Owl and the Pussycat:"

And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced to the light of the moon,
The Moon,
The Moon,
They danced to the light of the moon.

As it is with dancing, so it is with other features of Lear's nonsense: the presence of the artist in his work, his close attention to rhythm and rhyme. They are characteristic of his verse generally. The songs cannot be distinguished from the other nonsense on an either-or basis, as Miss Sewell might have it. As one might expect in nonsense verse written by one man, the limericks and the songs are distinguished only by varying degrees or intensities of the same characteristics.

The songs are less restrictive than the limericks. The demonic element of the limericks which seemed always to be threatening or enacting violence seems, in the songs, to have been tamed and less in need of the strictures of versification. This is not to imply that the vigor and the nonsense quotient of the songs is less than that of the limericks; it implies rather that the beast is less frightening in a larger and more subtly contrived cage. Consider,

for example that the nonsense factor has not been diminished in "The Jumblies" although, as a song, it has freer versification than a limerick.

> They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
> In a Sieve they went to sea:
> In spite of all their friends could say,
> On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
> In a Sieve they went to sea!
> And when the Sieve turned round and round,
> And every one cried, "You'll all be drowned!"
> They called aloud, "Our Sieve ain't big,
> But we don't care a button! we don't care a fig!
> In a Sieve we'll go to sea!"
> Far and few, far and few,
> Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
> Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
> And they went to sea in a Sieve.

The rhythm in this song is similar to that of the limericks in its predominance of ascending, anapestic feet; but the restriction to anapest is not so stringent here. The anapest is frequently arrested in mid-line and iambic feet substitute or take over the rest of the line. In line four of the above passage the alternating accents of the iambic convey the sense of the rhythmic spinning of the jumblies unsinkable sieve. There is a pleasing shift from ascending to descending rhythm in the line which marks the beginning of the haunting refrain:

> Far and few, far and few,
> Are the lands where the Jumblies live.

One might argue that the Jumbly song is not nonsense since the sense subverting strictures of rhythm are gone. But who can deny the nonsense in the absurd but delightful impunity of the Jumblies?

> "We don't care a button! we don't care a fig!
> In a Sieve we'll go to sea!"

Since the songs can be a freer rhythm than the limericks without a significant loss in their nonsense impact, similar freedoms might be found in their rhymes. Certainly, the songs are not so predictable in rhyme as are the limericks. Though there is generally a rhyme pattern to each stanza of the songs, their length, which is greater than that of any single limerick, effects a more pleasing variety in the rhyme. Lear's abandonment, in the songs, of the rigid four line stanza and the sense-subverting versification of the limericks suggests something quite apart from the limerick grotesqueries. And, while, in the songs, the very nature of refrains is repetitive and therefore somewhat predictive and controlling, their peculiar and melodious nonsense syllables furnish a harmony not found in the limericks. Images in the nonsense songs of "syllabub seas," "the far and silent, beautiful shore," "the slippery slopes of Myrtle," "Gromboolian plains," "the Zemmery Fidd," "hills of the Chankly Bore," "moonlight shade of mountains brown," and the recurrent images of questing and dancing all suggest something strangely harmonious or beautiful to the nonsense reader. Such beauty (a dangerously unifying force, according to Miss Sewell) is graciously complemented by the nonsensical events of each song. The contrast of absurdity and harmony is far more subtle in the songs than in the limericks where it is marked by sudden, rude, and aggressive laughter. In the songs there is a pleasure more gradually released.

The nonsense of the songs seems more beneficent than does the grotesque nonsense of the limericks. Characters who perform in the fantastic events of the songs seem to execute deeds with a great

deal of impunity if not valor. Although they sail in sieves or on turtles, tie on ridiculous noses, and dance in cups, none of the Jumblies or the Bonghy Bo, the Dong, and the bird, fish, mice, and insect creatures of "Calico Pie" are particularly mean creatures, meant to be punished or laughed at rudely. In spite of his absurd nose the Dong is a mysterious and romantic creature.

"The Dong! - - the Dong!
The wandering Dong through the forest goes!
The Dong! the dong!
The dong with a luminous nose!"

The Pobble, a daring channel swimmer, though "robbed of twice five toes," is still cherished by his aunt Jobiska, and even happier without them. When the dancing creatures of "Calico Pie" fade quite away, they are profoundly missed.

But they never came back to me!
They never came back!
They never came back!
They never came back to me!

The same is true of the deformed Bo whose departure is deeply mourned by the Lady Jingly Jones. These creatures of the songs seem to be in the nonsense but not of it. They are not subject to the shocks, the rude and aggressive treatment that the limerick subjects experience. It is almost as if in the limericks we see "things" in human disguises, while in the songs we perceive the truly human disguised as things. This might account for the special state of grace which distinguishes the characters of the nonsense songs from their counterparts in the limericks and other more grotesque nonsense. This special condition or state has not destroyed the nonsense value of the songs. And yet it exists primarily because of a fusion that

Miss Sewell arbitrated as inadmissable to nonsense: an intense union or at least conciliation of artist and creation. I would suggest that the remarkable differences in Lear's nonsense songs and the more grotesque nonsense can be explained in terms of a transmutation of the energies of the grotesque into something more sublime.

One of the earliest connotations of the word "sublime" has been that of emotional intensity. Were this the only connotation of the word, it would seem contradictory to call the songs more sublime than the limericks since the latter show more raw energy. However, in perhaps the earliest of definitions of the concept sublime, Longinus qualified that the emotional intensity of any sublime process would have a unifying function.[3] The limericks, whose energy is harnessed for four brief lines, are characterised by surprise and suddenness, the marks of the grotesque, and are therefore less inclined to unify experiences than are the longer songs. The intense relationship of Edward Lear to the action and contents of his limericks can be seen when the grotesque nonsense is considered in toto; each song, on the other hand, bears more of the personal marks of the author than any single limerick, and each song is closely related to the others by common motifs, such as the quest, and by common moods, and common refrains. The word "sublime" if suitable to nonsense at all, is more suitable to the nonsense songs than to the more grotesque nonsense.

The matter of intensity in the songs can be settled with reference to another function Longinus saw in the sublime, that of "raising the soul ... a proud step upwards, [until] it is filled

with joy and exultation, as though itself had produced what it shares." Certainly the most intensive of Lear's nonsense would be that which signifies a "step upwards," some progress of spirit or character in the artist. The supposition that such progress is indicated in the distinctions between the grotesque of the limericks and the more refined forms of the songs is somewhat justified by Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime. He maintains that the sublime affords a sense of delight resulting "from the idea of self-preservation, providing that the pain and danger inevitably associated with the latter do not press to nearly but involve us only through the effect of curiosity, sympathy, or imitation." The association of sublime delight with terror or horror, (the Romantic "horror of delight") could imply for Lear's nonsense songs, an imitation there, in its images, of terrifying objects and events once experienced by Lear himself. If Lear's nonsense songs were sublime in this sense, they would unify some aspects of his life into forms where they could be recognized, accepted, perhaps cherished, rather than annihilated as in the grotesque nonsense. It may be obvious by now that in this paper, the useage of "sublime" will tend more to "sublimation" than to the classic definition of Longinus.[4] It will indicate those nonsense works of Lear where the painful and dangerous objects of his imagination are transformed into shapes curious, but sympathetic, rather than into the ruder, laughable shapes of the grotesque. In this sense the sublime is a function of the artist's mastery of his art. It is not so much the object made beautiful which gives sublime delight as it is the experience of perceiving a once

terrifying object as something acceptable, perhaps beautiful.

However different they may be in their expression, the grotesque and the sublime in Lear's nonsense originate from the same source. Sidney Trachow, writing "On the Comic Process and Beauty" in Psychoanalytic Quarterly 1949, remarks that "it is possible that all arts have a similar function of warding off evil or danger." Lear's nonsense seems to function defensively in each of its two forms. In the creation of the comic in the grotesque, and in the creation of harmony through the sublime, Lear's motive seems to stem from "anxiety produced by a feared and hated object with which the artist must become reconciled." (Trachow, 282) The most unrefined of these "feared and hated objects" account for the presence of ugliness in the nonsense of Edward Lear. Ugliness there is associated with fear, and guilt and, ultimately, death.[5]

Skeat's etymology of the word "ugly" defines it as,

> frightful; hateful. It comes from a root connected with ugg- (icelandic) meaning fear, and with -ligr meaning -like. The main root is traced in the Gothic OGAN, again meaning to fear and "ogjan" meaning to terrify. The Scandanavian oga (dread) is connected with the O.H.G. egiso =terror and the Gothic agis =fear, anguish and the Irish aegal meaning the same thing. These words are derived from the same root as the Greek meaning anguish and affliction.

From the outset of this paper I have argued that the ugliness in Lear's nonsense is associated with ugly and involuntary elements in his life, his epilepsy, his own drole appearance, and his failures in art and human relationships. The success of his nonsense is that it allowed Lear to control these otherwise ugly and involuntary experiences.

In the songs Lear deals with the most unremitting and painful consequence of all his failings, his loneliness. Loneliness was to Edward Lear an expression of the death of that most vital and inaccessible quality, human love. The sublime in his nonsense can be interpreted as his passionate conquest of ugliness and death.[6] It follows, therefore, that the sublime in his nonsense demonstrates Lear's attempt at personal reconciliation to loneliness.

There does seem to be a correlation of the sublime and a reconciliation to loneliness in the nonsense songs. Those songs which are distinguished most strongly from the grotesque nonsense by virtue of their freer versification, their freedom from rude aggression, their greater unity and intensity: the most sublime of the songs, are also the songs which relate most strongly to the lonely Edward Lear. The "Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolus" song ends rudely and abruptly with the demolition of the entire Discobbolus family. There is nothing of Lear in this "domestic bliss." Even the more peaceful domestic songs, "The Owl and the Pussycat," "The Duck and the Kangaroo" are bereft of the characteristic Lear figure of the more sublime songs. Almost without exception the latter have as protagonist a deserted, lonesome creature, compelled to mourn for the fulfilling companionship which Lear found circumstances forbade him in his life. Among these figures are the abandoned Dong, beloved of a Jumbly girl, but unable to join her in her voyage across the sea in a sieve; the lonely singer in "Calico Pie;" and the Bo, bereft of his Lady Tingly by her bequeathal to "Handel Jones Esquire & Co." The ladies of these songs closely resemble two females in

Lear's life and imagination. The one was a rosy, amiable Greek maiden. He may not have known such a girl, but in his letters he would threaten jokingly to find her and marry her. The other, Lady Jingly, was of course the loyal Gussie Bethel, who doubtlessly would have married Lear; who married an invalid to care for him as perhaps she would have cared for the ailing, asthmatic Lear; who married perhaps in reaction to Lear's frightened refusal to propose to her; who after her husband's demise visited Lear in San Remo in the spring of 1883 and called on him every day; whom Lear would not, could not marry because of his fears of his own personal inadequacies and predilictions, not the least of which must have been his latent homosexuality. Lear wrote in his journal of "the Marriage phantasy," It will not let me be. Yet it seems an intangible myth. To think of it no more, is to resolve on the rest of my life being passed thus -- alone -- & year by year getting more weary -- to encourage it, is to pursue a thread leading to doubt & perhaps more positive misery.[7]

Although he might have wished to be a thoroughly "runcible" husband, the loving, lonely, but fearful old poet was fated by circumstances to be alone, and very much like the deserted figures of his nonsense songs. However real they may have seemed at times, the companionships of homosexuality and of marriage were both impossible to him. Decency forbade the one, nature the other. Therefore, where the songs express the joys of companionship, there is transmitted to the reader, a pervading and predominating sense of frustration. The reader senses that he is left outside friendships available only to animals and inanimate objects: Kangaroos and Ducks, Flies and Daddy-Long-legs, Pokers and Sugar Tongs, Tables and Chairs. The Jumblies sail away

and return; but we have not gone with them. We can only admire and resolve. We have yet to make the journey.

If we only live,
We too will go to sea in a Sieve, --
To the hills of the Chankly Bore!

Although in his grotesque verse or limericks, Lear struck out against loneliness and isolation, he embraced these in his songs. Although he could never enjoy the loneliness in his life, he could direct it into his art and make it a thing of some beauty there. He depicted his loneliest nonsense figures as human and strangely attractive beings. Having seen the drawing of "The Dong with the Luminous Nose" one is surprised to find in the verse following a verbal depiction of a mysterious and wondrous creature. His grotesque nose, we find, is not a nose but a lamp. He pipes a plaintive, not a discordant, sound. He wanders not for mean or ridiculous reasons but in search of his lost Jumbly girl. The verse describing his quest transcends somehow the grotesqueries of his plight. Much the same type of ambivalence characterizes the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo. However grotesque his appearance, the miraculously departed Bo is deeply mourned by the Lady Jingly Jones. Many of the nonsense songs have this same ambivalence. There is a hint of the sublime, but a hint only. There is in each enough of the humorous, and enough self-irony to eschew sentimentality. Lear's last nonsense song, "Incidents in the life of my Uncle Arly" is so accurate a biography of himself that it seldom escapes attention as such by those who read and write of him. It is a very poignant verse; it conveys a sense of the outrageous conditions life had imposed

upon him; it implies his moments of relief, and humor, and pain. Uncle Arly, like his creator, is a tragic, loveable Old Cove, but always sportive, always comic in his too tight shoes. Lear's nonsense completely avoids the maudlin tone so often assumed by the nonsense writing of Lewis Carroll. Miss Sewell accuses Lewis Carroll of "writing about love till he is blue in the face." She claims, and justly so, that his nonsense often fails when it attempts to "affect the heart." She states that "one is only too well aware of [Lear's] personality in the Nonsense songs, and the curious and interesting thing is that one agrees to let it work upon oneself ... whereas to Carroll dripping loving verbiage ... we will concede him nothing." The nonsense of Lear is successful not because he was detached from it, unaffected by it. On the contrary, its intensity and control stems from his vital commitment to the function of his verse. Lear did not value the isolation described in his nonsense verse. Nor was he as interested in the figures of the songs as in the sublime process of coming to terms with what they represented. The objects of his nonsense reflect hateful and ugly aspects of his life. He made these objects acceptable, even attractive; but his most sublime accomplishment was to keep mastery of his creations, that they might be an intense reflection of the terrors and anxieties which gave them birth. The nonsense poet, like any artist, must play at magic in his verses. Protected by their absurdity, he returns to the most fearsome territories of his life. He must chart a balanced course between the frightening

truth and the absurd so that he will not flee from the one or regress to the potential lunacy of the other. If he can do so, he will return from the "Torrible Zone" miraculously whole and unscathed.

> Artistic creation is magic by which the artist controls dangerous aggressive forces about him by mastering these forces with his own hands. His demonstration of this magical power is shared by his audience. The perfection of his technique (mastery) is the measure of his successful magical control. Once this has been achieved, attention can be partially shifted from the object to the perfection of composition: the fearsome object can now be loved. Thus defined, the ensuing relief and surrender in love to the object is the source of the pleasure in the apprehension of beauty.
> . . . . . .
> What should be emphasized is that the burden of repression is eased by transforming something hidden into something which may be exhibited, converting pain into pleasure, discomfort into creation, and release of tension. The artist's pleasure is thus secondary or derived, does not stem directly from his relations with objects but from his creation of beauty. Trachow, "Ugliness and Creativity", 284.

Although the nonsense of Edward Lear may, as Miss Sewell contends, stand complete in itself, it bears well the excellencies of its relieving and healthful tendencies.[8] When considered in close relation to its author, the nonsense stands as a tribute to a profoundly human person. Edward Lear may never have recognized consciously the full implications of the tendencies of his verse. This may account for its genuine depiction of his struggle with outrageous forces in his life. Because Lear did not think he wrote it in earnest, his nonsense hints tastefully, unpretentiously at his maturing reconciliation to things he could not change. This reconciliation, which is never so intense elsewhere as in the sublimity of his nonsense songs, is ultimately a tribute to more than the artist Lear. It is a tribute to the power of nonsense verse.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]Lear, Later Letters

[2]Time Magazine, (April 4, 1969), 82. Time has repeatedly ranked Vivien Noakes' Eward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer, London: Collins, 1968 among the top selling books of America.

[3]Freud, Basic Writings, edited by A.A. Brill, 745.

[4]Piaget, Play, 142.

[5]In Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, Henri Bergson speaks of objectivity as a necessity to laughter:

> Here I would point out, as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter. It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion ... Step aside, look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy. It is enough for us to stop our ears to the sound of music in a room, where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous ... To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart.

CHAPTER II

[1]Miss Noakes dismisses once and for all the notions about Lear's family background. In discussing his lineage Edward Lear would refer to his "Danish Grandfather," and how he changed his name from LØR to Lear. Miss Noakes proves that, in fact, his grandfather was born a Lear, he was English, and a butcher. Of Edward Lear's father and family Miss Noakes says:

> His father, a stockbroker, was indeed badly in debt; but he was never in King's Bench Prison. The family was split up somewhat. Lear was deserted by his mother and raised virtually by Ann. The family did not sell the house, Bowman's Lodge. The family returned to the house though they lived very simply afterwards, and it was here that Edward spent the rest of his strange and unhappy childhood.

She notes that Lear must have had his first attack of epilepsy when he was five or six.

> It must have been inherited, for his sister Jane was also an epileptic, and he remembered watching her attacks. His own seizures were often violent, and for a child they were terrible and frightening. The illness affected his whole life profoundly: it was a constant threat, for sometimes he had several attacks a day, and though they grew fewer as he became older they were no less violent. He had warning before they came on -- the aura epileptica -- so that he was able to get out of the way, and apparently nobody apart from his family ever realized that he was an epileptic.

These notes, discovered by Miss Noakes in the Edward Lear Diaries, disclose that the epilepsy could be apprehended beforehand. They imply that there may have been at one time, a connection in Lear's mind between masturbation and the fits.

> D. 14.2.80: It is wonderful that these fits have never been discovered--except that partly apprehending them beforehand, I go to my room.

> Also D. 17.2.87: ...reappearance of the Demon, after several weeks absence, a longer period than for years past. As yet it seems, that 'self control' is not worth much.

> And D. 12.4.87: X -- It does not seem that 'self control' has anything to do with the matter.

With this in mind, Miss Noakes suggests that there might have been guilty feelings associated with epilepsy stemming from the masturbation and that there might have been a direct effect upon the nonsense poetry.

> In the early nineteenth century it [epilepsy] was obscured by ignorance and old wives' tales, and one of these was that attacks could be brought on by masturbation. The usual threat offered to a little boy was that his penis would drop off and, like the Pobble whose toes disappeared when his scarlet flannel wrapper was taken away, Edward must sometimes have thought that there could be a connection between the two. As an adult he constantly blamed the attacks on his lack of will power, Edward sometimes must have thought that he would be happier without it ... The Pobble was given a feminine concoction of 'Lavendar water tinged with pink,' and perhaps this was the best solution.

It seems that Lear's guilt of masturbation was linked also with his own homosexual inclinations. Miss Noakes refers to his diary entry D. 19.6.71:

> He had another cruel memory from his childhood which he had never mentioned before. Early in June his cousin, his mother's sister's child, died in England. His name was Frederick Harding, and when Lear heard of his death he wrote in his diary. "it is just 50 years since he did me the greatest Evil done to me in my life, excepting that done by C: -- & which must last now to the end -- spite of all reason & effort." It was Easter Monday, April 8, 1822, and Frederick Harding, who was nineteen, had just been bought out of his regiment and was staying at Bowman's Lodge. Lear was not quite ten. He never elaborated on this, nor did he say who C was -- perhaps it was his brother, Charles. But he thought of it often, for many years afterwards when April 8th came round he would note the day in his diary.

The incident with Harding she assumes "was probably a homosexual advance which he later saw as the origin of his own homosexual inclinations." The reference to Charles must have referred, she thinks, to an introduction to masturbation. A later entry in the Journals would seem to confirm this.

> D. 25.5.59: The ---- (and) misery of some 55 or 56 years of past life ever before me -- & ever I have to turn away from too much thought of it, by a decision that it was no fault of my making, but inevitable and (growing) always from my 6th or 7th year -- year by year.

I am convinced that Miss Noakes did not choose to compile only the dark facts of Edward Lear's life, but that she has been willing to mention his experiences which others have ignored. Thus it comes to light that in his early twenties Lear enjoyed a heterosexual life, to the point of contracting syphilis.

> D. 20.2.85: " ... considering that I myself in 1833 had every sort of syphilitic disease, who am I to blame others, who have had less education and more temptation." In D. 8.8.81 Lear wrote on the death of an old friend, Henry Greening, "I fear dear good Bern H. will feel this. What days (and what nights) we used to share so long ago as 1830 or even earlier. Harry Greening was in those times the life of all our parties, albiet through him partly I got into bad ways."

[2]Honor Tracey, "The Runcible Man", Listener, (December 31, 1953), 1130-1131.

[3]See Appendix for picture of Lear.

[4]From The Later Letters of Edward Lear, collected by Lady Strachey, we have the following letter to Lady Waldegrave, (October 17, 1866):

> A few days ago in a railway as I went to my sister's a gentleman explained to two ladies, (whose children had my "Book of Nonsense,") that thousands of families were grateful to the author (which in silence I agreed to) who was not generally known -- but was really Lord Derby: and now came a showing forth, which leared up at once to my mind why that statement has already appeared in several papers. Edward Earl of Derby (said the gentleman) did not choose to publish the book openly, but dedicated it as you see to his relations, and now if you will transpose the letters L E A R you will read simply EDWARD EARL. -- Says I, joining spontanious in the conversation -- "That is quite a mistake: I have reason to know that Edward Lear the painter and author wrote and illustrated the whole book." "And I," says the Gentleman, says he -- "have good reason to know Sir, that you are wholly mistaken. There is no such a person as Edward Lear." "But," says I, there is -- and I am the man -- and I wrote the book!" Whereon all the party burst out laughing and evidently thought me mad or telling fibs. So I took off my hat and showed it all round, with Edward Lear and the address in large letters-- also one of my cards, and a marked handkerchief: on which amazement devoured those benighted individuals and I left them to gnash their teeth in trouble and tumult.
>
> Believe me, Dear Lady Waldegrave,
> Yours sincerely,
> EDWARD LEAR

[5]Examining briefly the folio of Mr. Osgood Field's Edward Lear on My Shelves in the British Museum, I found ample evidence collected from Lear's journals and letters (drawings of himself falling to pieces, overgrown with hair, or with overgrown nose, with a body of a bird, fish, beast, almost always in an aspect closely matching the grotesques of the limericks) to suggest that he imagined each limerick of himself. Particularly interesting in this respect are the journal entries: (1866, 1, 29) (1871, 5, 12) both of which depict Mr. Lear with the stick legs, bulbous body, and large facial features so characteristic of his limerick figures. Shortly after the latter entry, Lear wrote to Chichester Fortescue of morbid disease drawings he was making for hospitals and certain doctors of physic. On May 1, 1859 Lear wrote again to Fortescue, a poem this time, describing his " well developed nose." The poem was accompanied by another balloon shaped depiction of himself. In a Lear letter to Fortescue from Valetta, May 29, 1862 there is a drawing of himself as a bird, with a bush for hair. Similar bird drawings, almost identical to the bird drawings in the limericks, but unmistakably

self-caricatures of the author himself can be found in Lear's Letters to Lord Carlingford, October 6, 1882, to Lady Waldegrave, July 31, 1877, and Oct 25, 1873, and in three letters to chichester Fortescue, May 26, 1872, September 13, 1871, and August 9, 1863.

Another letter to Fortescue of September 1863 shows Lear astride a stile, and quite perplexed by a large cow. This drawing proves Lear's identification with the Old Man on the stile of the 1846 Book of Nonsense. An 1851 letter to Fortescue about Lear's work in the Academy shows him drawing at the Academy, surrounded by pranksters and meddlesome masters. He is the most fully drawn figure of the sketch, and he is plagued by the very sort of creatures who bother the primary figures of the nonsense drawings. He is hunched over and weeping. The portrait he draws is poor, infantile, even moreso than the simplest of figures in the nonsense drawings, since they have an economy of line.

There are several limericks in Mr. Osgood Field's collection where the illustration is unmistakably a pen-portrait of Lear himself. One such illustration accompanies this limerick:

> There was an old man who felt pert
> When he wore a pale rose coloured shirt
> When they said -- "Is it pleasant?"
> He cried -- "Not at present --
> Its a leetle too short -- is my shirt!" (p. 198)

On page 254 of Mr. Osgood Field's folio is an illustration which implies the macabre humor with which Lear addressed himself in his limericks and nonsense drawings. It is a sketch of a skeletal death figure on a skeletal camel overtaking and spearing the wandering Lear. See Appendix B for further drawings from Lear Letters which are identical in tone and style to the limerick illustrations.

[6]Those who are qualified to make conclusions on the sexual implications of the noses in Lear's drawings would have much to speculate on. The noses are by far the most outstanding of all the features of the limerick personnae. They come in an assorted range of phallic sizes and seem to be insinuated into every major action of the drawings and verses. It is interesting to note that Lear, who was greatly disturbed by his homosexual tendencies and masturbation, would so displace the functions of the noses that, on men, the greatest noses are used for lanterns, branches, horns, tassels, and brushes. They are often limp, or curling, or, like the nose of the Dong, tied on. Occasionally they are smashed or bitten off. But, says one old man with a nose,

> "if you choose to suppose,
> That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!"

On women, however, the noses are quite perplexing. They grow to hideous and hysterical proportions. They never have any practical uses, and, consequently, make the women cross and aggressive.

Neo-Freudians might also take note, in the drawings, of sharp and extended chins, bird beaks, pointy-ears and sharpened tails and limbs. Others, in search of an antidote to psychoanalysis in literature could be referred to "That Suprasensical Lear", New York Times Book Review, July 19, 1966, p. 6 wherein Lord Dunsany spoofs the psychoanalytical approach to nonsense.

[7]Freud, Basic Writings, 633.

[8]Freud uses the word nonsense to define a component of a great deal of wit. As such nonsense affords the pleasure of a regression to infantile word-play and the pleasure of subversion of reason. But in each case wit does not exist unless there is some "sense in nonsense," that is, unless the absurdity is veiled adequately, by some semblance of sense, to pass the censor of conscious reasoning. Pleasure, or the economy in intellectual expenditure afforded by wit, arises in each case from the power of the apparent sense to distract the censor from the real absurdity in the nonsense. My earlier discussion of Cammaerts, however, illustrated that this "sense in nonsense" is not characteristic of the type of limerick written by Lear, nor, for that matter, of Lear's nonsense in general. While this is so, Lear's nonsense is demonstrably tendentious and employs invective.

There is also, in general terms, another similarity of wit to Lear's nonsense. This is the element of contest characteristic of wit which seems to be an engagement of two levels of consciousness in Lear's verse. First, there is that level which recognizes the nonsense construction as harmless, mere absurdity. The second level, more remote from consciousness than the other, senses the function of the nonsense construction in disarming, or diminishing personal shortcomings and fears which, in the light of reason, could be far more threatening and arouse a great deal more anxiety.

[9]Julius Laffal, author of "Language, Consciousness, and Experience", Psychoanalytic Quarterly. XXVI (1937), 65, summarizes that: "Freud's ideas of language as an energy discharge mechanism and of the role of language in consciousness provide the link within the individual that connects language and experience.

. . . . . .

Language as an energeic mechanism raises to the level of consciousness, inner processes otherwise out of our grasp, while serving at the same time as a means of sharing such processes with others.

. . . . . .

When a word is attached to an experience, there is an increase in cognitive and referential precision which may, in some instances amount to becoming aware of what was only previously undefined."

[10] D.E. Berlyne, Conflict, Arousal, Curiosity, 257-259. Berlyne subsumes the theories of Freud, Kant, Bergson and others by associating laughter with the ability to diminish the "surprise value" in an environment. In the appreciation of art and especially in responses to the comic he sees: "some factor that is associated with threat, discomfort, uncertainty, surprise, or in a word, arousal, and some factor that signifies a safety, readjustment, clarification or release."

The underlying mechanism of this more or less sophisticated "arousal jag" Berlyne says is,

> something of this sort. On receiving a stimulus with a high arousal value, the nervous system prepares itself for a serious, even demanding energetic action, or at least, for a laborious effort to make out what is going on. If the sequel is as anticipated, arousal will be maintained at the appropriate level through the interaction of, on the one hand, the arousal value of the external stimuli and the facilitating influence of the cortex on the RAS (Reticular Arousal System - see also J.D. French, "The Reticular Formation," Scientific American, 196, 54)and, on the other hand, the inhibitory influence exerted on the RAS by the cortex.
>
> But sometimes, the foreshadowed emergency will fail to materialize, or it will materialize in the presence of reassuring stimuli that rob it of its menace; something heralded as strange or complex will turn out to be trivially familiar or simple, The information content of a signal will be lower than the uncertainty or expected suprisingness. Then the balance will be upset, since corticireticular inhibition, exceeding what is required, will briefly overwhelm the counteracting processes. It will be rather like a man bracing himself to withstand a blow that never comes.

The energy once reserved for the expectation or emergency is channeled into laughter or some other response signalling pleasure in the reduction of tension. (underlining mine)

CHAPTER III

[1]Mr. Holbrook in his introduction the The Complete Nonsense speaks of these concerns with reference to their expression in Lear's verse portrait: "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear," and in Lear's letters and verse in general.

[2]Osgood Field, Lear, xiv.

"Often at the end of the month he would record the number of siezures that he had had: for example, in 1859 his record was complete with the omission of December in the following figures: January 16, February 15, March 12, April 14, May 13, June, July, August 18 each, September 15, October 16, and November 10. The attacks came usually in the early evening and in the early morning, and on many occasions he noticed that he was quite incapacitated for several hours."

(See also note 5, Chapter I)

Angus Davidson, Lear, 18. says this of the epilepsy:

> He never alludes to this in his letters to Ann or to his most intimate friends: it is only in his private diaries that he speaks of it. Sometimes he uses the word "epilepsy;" generally, he refers to it as "The Demon," or the "terrible Demon." "I suppose the ever-presence of the Demon, since I was seven years old, would have prevented happiness under any sort of circumstances. It is a most merciful blessing that I have kept up as I have, and have not gone utterly to the bad mad sad." That he felt it an almost intolerable burden there is no doubt: it is equally certain that his whole subconscious life was coloured by it, and that it was largely responsible for the deep melancholy which constantly beset him and for those fits of irritability of which no one was more guiltily conscious than himself.

[3]See Richardson, Lear, 21.

[4]Davidson, Lear, 236.

Lear never succeeded in applying the principle of conduct that he had suggested for himself -- 'to be altogether jelly-fish-fashion, caring for nobody.' Rather he cared too much. Unable to present to the darts of misfortune a slippery surface of armour his vulnerability made him a too helpless victim of every kind of onslaught: joined with the nervous instability and the tendency to melancholy that were almost certainly a result of his epilepsy, it handicapped him severely in his dealings with life and injured any hope of lasting happiness.

[5]Lear regarded with the highest disdain the "curious" English abroad who would interrupt his privacy to view his paintings and never buy. But certainly far more disturbing, and a possible source for the absurdities of his limericks were his experiences with superstitious crowds of eastern countries. Davidson notes this of Lear's experiences:

> Drawing and painting savoured to the citizens of this area, Mohammedan by religion, of evil magic. At Monastir crowds surrounded the innocent artist as he sat sketching, with cries of 'Shaitan!' -- till he was forced to seek a guard, armed with a whip, from the local Pasha: at Chrida, in Albania, he was pelted with stones and sticks, and forced, in self-defence, to take to a fez; at Tirana he was attacked ballet-wise, by a Dervish who denounced him with frantic imprications... "We will not be written down," said they, "The Frank is a Russian, and he is sent by the Sultan to write us all down before he sells us to the Russian Emperor." (Davidson, 68)

It was perhaps Lear's lack of sympathy for such magic which allowed him to see the humour in this situation and "debunk", with another kind of magic in his nonsense drawings, the danger of these and other situations he was subject to.

[6]Richardson, Edward Lear, 31.

[7]See D.H. Monro, Argument of Laughter, 87.

[8]See note [4], Chapter I.

[9]See note [9], Chapter II.

[10]Lee Byron Jennings in "The Term Grotesque", The Ludicrous Demon, 16, remarks of this ambivalence in the grotesque.

> As a result of our findings, the widely diverging views of the grotesque as something playful or innocuous, on the one hand, and horrible on the other, can be resolved. The grotesque is an intimate combination of both features. The grotesque presents the terrible in harmless guise and its playfulness is constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror.

I would suggest of Lear's grotesques that the "horrible in disguise" is most often transformed positively. However dark the implications of Lear's grotesque nonsense might have been to himself, he is careful to make this horror resolve or "collapse" into laughter for the reader.

[11]Henri Bergson, Laughter, 73.
It is interesting to note that Lewis Carroll employs the same type of control, primarily as a safety device. When the terrors of the trip to the underground world of Alice's imagination grow too real, too human, and threatening, they become suddenly, and very satisfactorily, "just a pack of cards."

[12]I therefore assume that there is a type of control to nonsense, and Miss Sewell would seem to be right in assuming this. But the control must be explained with reference to the author of that control, and with some reference to a need within him to exercise it. The key to the control is not a solidity, and convention which is innate and permanent to the objects of the nonsense, but in the transformation of our perception of the objects. Laughter is freed only when the objects, having appeared to be changing or grotesque, prove to the observer to be really stable or rigid. Such laughter is, as Lant would have it, "the result of an expectation, which, of a sudden, ends in nothing."

[13]Bergson, Laughter, 17.
Henri Bergson implies that laughter is a social corrective for the offensive vice of rigidity of some sort or other.

> The living body ought to be the perfection of suppleness, the ever-alert activity of a principle always at work ... The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar, inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absent-mindedness in men and in events ... It is in this sense only that laughter corrects men's manners. It makes us at once endeavor to appear what we ought to be, what some day we shall perhaps succeed in being.

CHAPTER IV

[1]Clayborough, Grotesque, 4.

[2]See note [9], Chapter II.

[3]See note [5], Chapter I, and note [11], Chapter II.

[4]Noakes, Wanderer, Chapter V, note [5].

[5]Lee Byron Jennings, The Ludicrous Demon, 16.

As a result of our findings, the widely diverging views of the grotesque as something playful or innocuous, on the one hand, and horrible on the other, can be resolved. The grotesque is an intimate combination of both features. The grotesque presents the terrible in harmless guise and its playfulness is constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror. See also note [4], Chapter III.

[6]In his discussion of the "Estranged World" of the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, distinguishes the fanciful world of the fairy tale from the more dangerous and frightening grotesque.

> Viewed from the outside, the world of the fairy tale could also be regarded as strange and alien. Yet its world is not estranged, that is to say, the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us do not suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous. It is our world which has to be transformed... In this way the kind of strangeness we have in mind is somewhat more closely defined. We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death. Structurally, it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable. (p. 185)

[7]Lear had experienced all of these horrors in his ugliness, his epilepsy and homosexuality. His nonsense was a "taming ground" for the grotesque images of these horrors. In this connection, Mr. Jennings has observed that "the grotesque serves as a focal point for all that the author fears and abhors." There are dangers implicit in such use of the grotesque for in such cases it is "a satire and caricature, humor with deliberate ends, potentially bitter, mischievous, malicious." "The satire looses its positive function when it takes on its own existence... When the demonic element is not concealed the grotesque is transformed into madness."

[8]Mr. Jennings argues that the grotesque figure is,"in a sense, an organic whole, in that a living creature is represented, an 'organism' made up of parts that should not function together but that plainly do so. The grotesque has a substance, vigor, and depth; a conglomeration of disparate parts is not grotesque unless the resulting creature takes on a life of its own."(p. 9)

[9]Jennings, The Demon, 9.

Even the most outlandish demon is human in its general appearance, however inhuman its individual features may be. Where combinations of man and beast occur, the most grotesque are undoubtedly those in which man predominates. The impression of humanness must not be too strong, the distortion not so great that it obliterates all traces of the human figure... but, on the other hand, it must show a drastic departure from the elements of human appearance and personality that we commonly experience. The grotesque object is a figure imagined in terms of human form but devoid of real humanity.

[10]Piaget, Play, 142.

[11]Jennings, The Demon, 10.

[12]Freud, Basic Writings, 717.

[13]Freud, Basic Writings, 754, 755. Freud gives little consideration to nonsense as a function independent of with other than to state that it cannot be partaken of by the adult without the aid of some toxic agency, laughter or psychosis. He sees nonsense as the pleasure source in a great deal of wit. To him wit is sense in nonsense. "The thought which sinks into the unconscious for the purpose of wit formation only revisits the old homestead of the former playing with words. The thought is put back for a moment into the infantile state in order to regain in this way childish pleasure-sources."

In each case, however, the resistance of critical reason must be overcome. "This peculiar infantile manner of thinking is by no means easy to grasp in the consciousness of the adult because it is usually corrected, so to say, in statu nascendi."

Therefore the willingness to indulge in nonsense or even to create it has come to be considered strange, rare, and somewhat grotesque. Lear's nonsense, especially his limerick, is remarkable for the fact that it can exist so independent of the sense which would convert it into wit or jest. In its refusal to make the compromise of sense to reason, nonsense is very like the dream. "A radical distinction between wit and dreams is shown in the manner in which dream solves this difficulty in the substitution of inner associations (similarity, casual connection etc.) by the so-called outer associations (simultaneity, contiguity in space, assonance)."

[14]The comic of motion which is evoked so thoroughly in caricature, Freud associates with a saving in psychic energy. Caricature of necessity simplifies depictions of reality by emptying them of specific detail and exaggerating one or several characterizing

features of the caricatured object into a grimmace. In Psycho-analytic Explorations in Art, 182, Ernst Kris speaks of the tendentious nature of simplification and distortion in caricature:

> It is the resemblance between a man and his image which really first gives caricature its specific character, namely the distorted reproduction of a recognizable likeness. The comparison between a person and his caricature causes a saving in expenditure of thought, and so produces an effect which in the narrowest sense of Freud's definition is comic. But by means of condensation, displacement and allusion, certain elements in the distortion point to the existence of other ideas, the distorting ones, we might say, are the elements which betray the tendency. That is, the author is no longer so anonymous.

[15] Joachim F. Whohlwill surveys research on this characteristic of space-distance perception in Advances In Child Development and Behavior, ed. L. Lipsitt, C. Spiker, New York: Academic Press, 1963. He discusses specifically a case of size perception in the horizontal plane emphasizing that 5-to-7-year old children had considerable difficulty in measuring the size of objects extended on a horizontal plane, whereas they were able to measure sizes extending vertically with some accuracy. (p. 287)

[16] All these features of Lear's nonsense drawings are consistent with the characteristics of children's drawings discussed by Elizabeth Hurlock in Child Development, 459.

> The child's first drawings are symbolic, not direct copies of objects. The child is not interested in perspective, proportions, or relationships. He puts in details that interest him, such as the buttons on a coat, while omitting essentials, such as a man's legs. From about the sixth year, the child tries to show regard for size perspective, and correctness of detail.
> By the time the child is eight years old, perspective is well developed. Transparency, or drawing a person or object as it would be viewed by X-ray picture, is quite rare after eight years of age .
> . . . . . .
> Because the child draws mainly from memory, his drawings are usually inaccurate and incomplete. There is a marked lack of proportions, as may be seen in pictures of people whose heads are larger than their bodies. The faces are rigid and expressionless, and all people, all houses, or all animals tend to follow a sterotyped pattern. Ornamentation appeals to the child; he therefore concentrates more attention on it than on other parts of the drawings. Animals are frequently drawn with human heads but with animal-like bodies and four legs.

[17]Lear was painfully conscious of his "inability" to draw correctly the human body, and in 1849 decided to spend a year in drawing lessons at the Academy Schools in London. However, the curriculum was rigid, and tiresome, and he never did get to the stage where he was drawing the human body. See Davidson, Lear, 75.

[18]Lear was by no means responsible for the very first limerick. E.T. Hanrahan of Dublin notes in The Observer, (Sunday, December 24, 1967).

> It is surely more than a coincidence that the poetic school -- Filna Maighe -- which flourished in Co. Limerick a half-century before the birth of Edward Lear should have made extensive use of this verse form. The following translation, which preserves the metre of the Irish original (c. 1765), is addressed to the chief poet of the school, the erudite Sean O tuama (died 1775), by his fellow poet Aindria MacCraith:

O tuomy! you boast yourself handy
At selling good ale and bright brandy.
But the fact is, good liquor
Makes everyone sicker,
I tell you that, I your friend Andy.

[19]See note [7], Chapter II.

[20]Jackson, Nonsense, xxiv.

[21]See note [11], Chapter II.

[22]Lear Diaries: (9, 10, 1862), (4, 2, 1871), (12, 4, 1871), (30, 3, 1872) See also notation [5], Chapter I.

[23]Lear was fully conscious of the complaining nature of many of his letters, try as he might to make them cheerful and enjoyable. He wrote and published an "Ecologue" of his own "foolish growlings," condemning himself through the interlocution of Mrs. John Symmonds to:

cold, stewed, minced, hashed mutton --
To wristbands ever guiltless of a button --
To raging winds at sea, (where don't you wish
Your luck may ever let you catch one fish?) --
To make large drawings nobody will buy --
To paint oil pictures which will never dry --
To write few books which nobody will read --
To drink weak tea, on tough old pigs to feed.

[24]Davidson, Lear, 94.

It was characteristic in him thus to introduce nonsense words and spelling into his letters as a sort of apology for what might seem too bold, or, sometimes, too sententious, or too outspoken -- a bridge between, on the one hand, his love of frankness, and, on the other, his easily embarrassed sensitiveness. Terrified of being thought presumptuous or pushing, he found in this nonsense-language a kind of cloak for self-consciousness. "Do you think there is a Pharmouse of a Nin somewhere near you, where there would be a gign room looking to the North, so that I could paint in it quietly and ..."

[25]Noakes, Wanderer, Chapter XIX, note 41.

The Journals describing Lear's Indian travels have been censored either by Lushington or Lord Northbrook to whom Lushington sent them, and any parts which could concievably be compromising--generally the epileptic X's whose meaning he probably didn't understand but guessed at, and Lear's reference to Plato's Phaedo - have been heavily inked out.

. . . . . .

d, 1.8.74. This entry in Lear's Journal has been heavily inked out. Reading of the Platonic ideals of love, Lear pondered on his own sexuality. He struggled to keep this bricked up behind a wall of suppression ... and I believe this is what he is referring to here.

"The ------ and misery of some 55 or 56 years of past life ever before me --- & ever have I to turn away from too much thought of it, by a decision that it was no fault of my making, but inevitable and [growing] always from my 6th or 7th year -- year by year," he wrote in his journal, an entry which was heavily inked out by Lushington when he read the journal after Lear's death.

[26]In his introduction to The Complete Nonsense, Holbrook Jackson remarks on Lear's habitual punning, irony, "Wellerisms," "Spoonerisms," phonetic spelling, neologisms, and nonsense sentences which "read like Finnean's Wake." The fact that these letters were to adult friends, and the fact that the nonsense play with words, particularly its most childish forms, occur especially when Lear is broaching some affectionate feeling or some request, demonstrate that nonsense was to Lear guarded attempt to engage himself in the love and sympathy of others.

CHAPTER V

[1]Sewell, Nonsense, 93.

[2]Sewell, Nonsense, "Will You, Won't You?", 192.

[3]Burke, Enquiry, 233.

[4]Usage of the word sublime has tended towards sublimation since the seventeenth century according to The Oxford English Dictionary, which has classified the following usages of the words, sublimation, sublimate, sublime and sublimed.

> Sublimate: to elevate to a higher state or plane of existence; transmutation into something higher, purer. 1652 J. Smith Sel. Disc. VII. iv. 334. "That perfection of which they speak ... was nothing else but a mere sublimation of their own natural powers and principles." 1816 T.L. Peacock Headlong Hall v, "That enthusiastic sublimation which is the source of greatness and energy."
>
> Sublimate: transmitting into something higher, nobler, more refined. 1858 Froude, Hist. Eng. IV. xviii. 59. "Their understandings were too direct to sublimate absurdities into mysteries."
>
> Sublime: of persons, their attributes, feelings, actions; standing above others by reason of nobility or grandeur of nature or character... Passing into a term of higher commendation. 1838 Longf. Lt. Stars ix, "Thou shalt know ... how sublime a thing it is too suffer and be strong."
>
> Sublimed: to transmute into something higher, nobler, or more excellent. 1855 Macaulay Hist. Eng. xii. III. 193. "His very selfishness therefore is sublimed into public spirit."

One modern usage subscribed by The Miriam Webster International Dictionary is, "to direct energy of (an impulse) from a primitive aim to one that is higher in the cultural scale."

[5]Rickman, "Ugliness and Creativity", 249.

> Ugliness has a power over us, we cannot treat it with indifference. It rouses our deep-set emotions and its horror lingers in the memory. The entymology of the word shows that it is closely connected in men's minds with fear; but we also find on closer viewing that it rouses anxiety and guilt.

[6]Rickman, "Ugliness and Creativity", 256.

> In the works of man, as in those which we separate and call the products of nature, we see creative and destructive forces in active interplay. When we discern the influence of creation predominating, we are moved by something we call beauty; when we see destruction, we recoil at the ugly. Our need for beauty springs from the gloom and pain which we experience from our destructive impulses. Our wish is to find in art evidence of the triumph of life over death. We recognize the power of death when we say a thing is ugly.

It also is interesting to note at this time some things in the writings of Ernst Kris in Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, 174-176, which suggest that the grotesque, the comic, the humorous, and the sublime are in a sort of continuum in which the "psychic apparatus" attempts to reduce or "equalize" tensions which constitute a menace to existence. At one end of the continuum, associated with the grotesque, is mania, the psychological correlate of the comic. At the antipode is ecstacy, correlate of the sublime. Kris observes that the comic affords a less permanent resolution of conflicts than humor or the sublime, but remarks that in self-irony of humor there is a stamp of aggression which emphasizes the difficulty of separating the comic and humorous. He also warns that "we should not allow ourselves to be misled by the contrast between the comic and the sublime into forgetting that they serve a common purpose: the mastery of an inner danger."

> Finally, I would refer to ecstasy as the opposite pole to mania; it is disguised by the triumph of the superego. The ego for the time being, surrenders its independence, possibly in the interests of a "tendency" to unification (Deutsch, 1927) which controls the mental apparatus. This contrast between the two has a real significance beyond its purely formal implications. For if mania is to be regarded as the pathological correlate of the comic, we must look to the sublime for the experience which corresponds in normal life to ecstacy. But we know that the sublime is a "psychic greatness," and if the comic effects a reduction of mental energy, the sublime calls for a surplus expenditure of this. This aspect of the problem may throw light on another idea of Freud's namely, the special position of humor, the only phenomenon in the whole realm of the comic bordering on the sublime. This is not so much because it has passed beyond ambivalent levels and represents the superego's contribution to the comic, but first and foremost because it finds its fulfillment in relation to the subject himself and so has no need of others before it can offer an increased pleasure gain. It belongs within the mental economy of a single individual, and this may account for its near relation to the sublime. It seems that this variety of the comic is latest in developing

in the course of a man's life, it passes as a sign of emotional maturity and is less dependent on restricted social and temporal norms than other forms of the comic. In this, too, it is more akin to the sublime."

These observations reinforce what has been said about "a step upwards" in the nonsense of Lear by indicating that such a step has been taken in its progression from the grotesque of the limericks, by far the earliest forms of the nonsense, to the more sublime forms of the songs.

[7]Noakes, Wanderer,

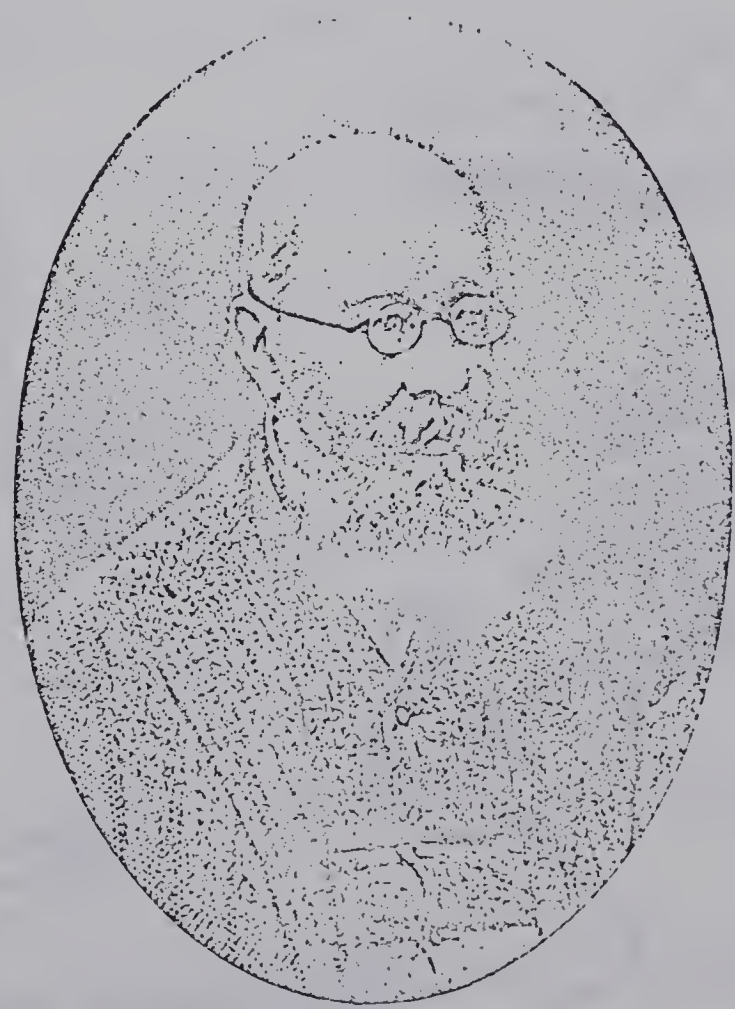
In the spring of 1883 Gussie arrived in San Remo. Her husband had died a few months earlier, and she was free again. She came to the Villa Tennyson every day during her stay, but he didn't propose. On the morning she left he went into his garden and picked three nosegays -- one for Gussie, and one for each of her nieces who were travelling with her, and he took them up to the hotel. Whilst he was with them he was composed: as he left he wept.

[8]Kris, "Ego and the Comic", 215.

In a particular form the comic relief is permanent, or here it is not an often-repeated attempt of the ego to find a solution, but a permanent transformation of the ego. We begin to realize the value of the humorist's achievement, for he banishes man's greatest fear, the eternal fear, acquired in childhood, of the loss of love. The precious gift of humor makes men wise; they are sublime and safe, remote from all conflict.

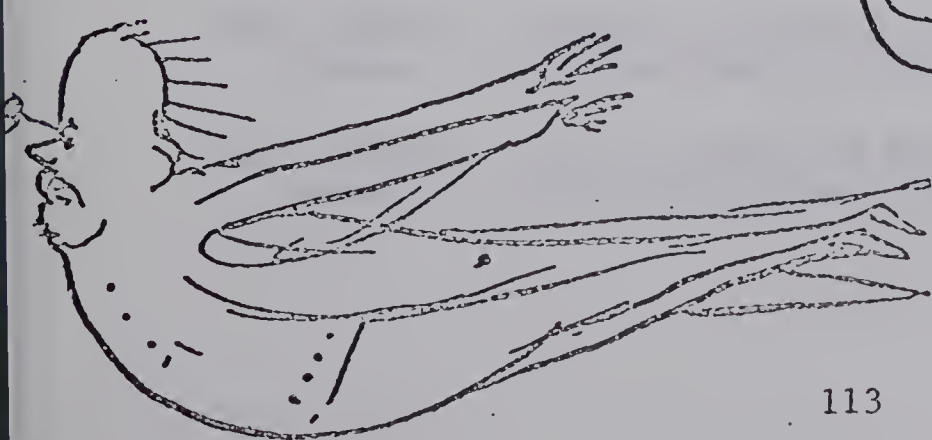
APPENDIX A

LAST PHOTOGRAPH OF LEAR, 1887.



EDWARD LEAR IN 1881.

EDWARD LEAR, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, 1886.



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